MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. I No 2 DEC. 1st 1917

PRICE 10 Cents

Feature Story

ZITANA of MAISON ROUGE

By E. W. Doughty

Feature Story Out December 15, "The Mysterious Web." Read It.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ISSUED SEMI-MONTHLY

Vol. I DECEMBER 1, 1917 No. 2

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Published Twice a Month by

FRANK TOUSEY, Publisher

168 West 23d Street, New York

N. Hastings Wolff, Pres.
Charles W. Hastings, Treas.
Charles E. Nylander, Sec.

LU. SENARENS, Editor

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SUSCRIPTION PRICE:

Domestic, Single Copy	10 Cents
Domestic, Yearly	$2.50
Canada	$2.75
Foreign	$3.00

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Zitana of Maison Rouge

A STORY BASED ON THE MYSTERY OF SPIRITUALISM

By FRANCIS W. DOUGHTY

CHAPTER ONE

1900—DEAD OR ALIVE?

A MAN, two women, and a child in a raging norther. The Gulf of Mexico was lashed into foam. On the beach lie the dead bodies of men and women, washed ashore by the rolling tide; wreckage is strewn everywhere. It is a desolate scene—the very abomination of desolation.

The sky is alive with scudding clouds; the roll of the waves indicates the force of the wind; two women crouch in the battered shell of a lifeboat which has saved their lives where others have perished. The man, a cripple, who moves with halting step, looks around attentively.

"At last we are safely landed, Adele," he said. "It would seem that we were the only ones to escape. We must seek shelter, for the storm is by no means over. Follow me."

The woman addressed—it was she who held the child—made no reply. Singularly beautiful, with dark hair and big, black eyes, she might have been taken for a Spaniard or a Cuban; nothing about her dress indicated her rank. Her clothes, like those of her companion's, were saturated. The child, which she pressed to her breast, was in the same condition. Of the wreck of the steamer *Golden Queen*, these people were the sole survivors. The desolate coast of Southern Louisiana offered them but a sorry shelter, yet it was life, where to all others it had been death, for the fatal norther had done its work.

The second woman was of a different type, somewhat tall, slender, and with regular features; there was a slight cast of color in her face which indicated the presence of negro blood; she was, however, the much handsomer of the two, and carried herself with more dignity than her companion. They were a singular group, the occupants of the only lifeboat out of four which had reached the shore.

"Rabineau, what are we to do?" peevishly demanded the

woman with the child. "We can't stay here. These corpses fill me with horror. Suggest something. Liza, take the baby. My arms are paralyzed. My God, this is a terrible state of affairs! I thought I knew what trouble was, but this——"

"Hush, missy!" said her companion, taking the child; "Heaven has spared our lives, for all the others seem to have perished. So let us be thankful; it is all we can do."

"Let us go forward," said the man, who had been looking about in a perplexed fashion. "Shelter is what we need. We can't expect much here; this country is practically uninhabited, but there is always a chance, and the storm is surely coming upon us again."

Neither woman replied as they followed the man along the beach. He walked with halting step; one leg was evidently shorter than the other; his face, however, was pleasing. Kindness beamed from his deep-set, gray eyes. That he was a person of decision was easily seen. For fully ten minutes they advanced in silence. The lightning play was incessant; the muttering thunder did its utmost to emphasize the desolation of the picture, and the child moaned in its nurse's arms.

"Come, Adele, hasten!" cried the man. "A downpour is upon us. Don't wait for me, but hurry forward with Liza, for Marie's sake, and seek the first shelter, if it is only some negro cabin. I will follow as best I can."

The woman made no reply. She seemed dazed, as well she might be after what she as well as the others had passed through. Her companion, however, was cool and alert, although also silent. That her position was that of a servant was evident; equally so was it that her intelligence was the superior of the two. They pushed on along the beach. Rabineau was soon left far behind.

"Liza, have you the least idea where we are?" asked Adele at length.

"No definite idea, nursy," was the reply. "Always to the west of New Orleans—that's all I can say."

"'Twas his country. Strange that I should find myself here."

"Perhaps it's fate, nursy. After all, there is nothing strange in it, for our lives are guided by those on the other side."

"Bah! Don't bore me with such spiritualistic rot!" cried the woman peevishly. "Haven't I suffered enough? We are lucky to be alive."

"There is no death, nursy," was the quiet response.

"Stop it!" cried Adele impatiently. "You make me disgusted. At a time like this, too! What is that I see ahead of us? Surely, it's a hut?"

"Seems to be, nursy."

"Then that is our destination. Oh, that I had never left Paris! To think what I have sacrificed?"

"Fate, nursy. The Almighty alone knows what is in store for us."

An impatient gesture was the only response. They hurried on and gained the hut—a mere shack—just as the storm broke afresh.

The lightning play was constant, the crashing thunder deafening; and then the rain came!

"Throw little Zitana down on that table and shut the door. I shall get wet!" cried Adele. "The rain is coming again. Oh, how I suffer! Everything is against me. If I was only back in Paris! If I had never married! It was all an awful mistake!"

The nurse tenderly laid the child—a girl—on the table, where it moaned faintly. Its condition was certainly as precarious as it was little understood by the mother, who now looked about in disgust. The old table and one chair with a broken back constituted the sole furnishing of the room.

"Beastly!" fretted Adele. "Have I got to put up with this? Rabineau was mad to take me away from my friends. Oh, God! Look! Look!"

A bolt of fire had suddenly appeared on the table followed by a deafening crash outside.

The fire-ball was perfectly round, and about the size of an orange. Rolling toward the child, it lodged against its head for an instant and then vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

"Heavens!" gasped Adele. "Are my troubles never to end?"

"Marie!" cried Liza. "Look!"

The child had stiffened, lay rigid, and Adele, bending over it, gave utterance to a shriek.

"She is dead! She has been struck by lightning!" she cried.

Liza had her look at the little one.

"Isn't it so?" demanded the mother in agonized tones.

"It certainly looks so, nursy!"

Shriek after shriek now burst from Adele's lips.

"It is the end! I am robbed of everything, even of my child!" screamed the frantic woman, as with wildly waving arms she rushed out into the storm.

"Stay, nursy! Stay!" cried Liza, following.

Madness was in full possession of the bereft woman.

Into a great wave which at that moment broke upon the beach she threw herself and was swept away.

"May the Almighty save her soul!" moaned Liza. "Was it worth while that we escaped from the wreck for this?"

She stood staring seaward, heedless of the din of the storm until at length inspiration seemed to seize her.

"I must act!" she murmured. "Some one must have sense. Rabineau won't be here yet a while. What will he do—what will he say? And he loved her so, poor fool."

She re-entered the hut. The child on the table lay rigid, to all appearance dead. For a moment Liza bent over it.

"I can't decide," she murmured. "I must have instructions." She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Lavinia!" she called in a loud voice. "Lavinia! I want you! Lavinia! Come!"

Again and again she repeated the call. And the shadows deepened; the child lay rigid on the table; still the monotonous cry.

The night shadows deepened; the roar of the storm was intensified; the room grew almost dark.

"Lavinia! Lavinia! Lavinia!"

Still the cry, repeated. A casual observer might have thought the woman excited; a more acute person would have sized up the situation as just the reverse. Persistency is only too often mistaken for excitement, obstinacy, selfishness, or——

Enough! The calling had ceased. Liza's eyes were fixed upon the floor at a point near the open fireplace; they were contemplating a human head. At least so it seemed to Liza.

It was a very ugly head; a very black head; the head of a negress in no way differing from the heads of thousands of her class to be found in that part of the world. The woman's masterful calmness increased rather than diminished, as she addressed the sigular object, which, seen in the shadows on the hearth, looked grewsome enough.

"So you've come at last."

The thick, black lips moved, and white teeth glistened behind them. A strange light, absolutely colorless, seemed to gather around the head, throwing it out in bold relief. Now it could be seen that there were no eyes, just a pair of empty sockets which gave the face a most repulsive look. No sound came from the moving lips as yet, although the effort to speak was apparent. Liza stamped her foot with an appearance of rage.

"Hurry! Hurry!" she cried. "You know the trouble I'm in. I need your help."

The answer came.

"Ah suah do, honey; Ah suah do. I'se done mah best. Golly, do I hev to tell yer? Kean't yo' see fo' yerself how big a hurry I'se been in? Never stopped to mak' nuffin' but mah big mouf; didn't even waste de force to make mah eyes. Lak' to have yo' tell me what mo' Ah could de fo' mah gal?"

"Cease your prattle and answer my questions!" cried Liza. "Death has been everywhere this evil day. Now it has hit me, and——"

"Hol' on, Liza! Yo' all wrong. 'Tain't hit, nohow."

"What? The lightning-bolt—the child!"

"Ah dunno nuffin' 'bout yer lightning-bolt. Ah kean't see dem t'ings lak' yo' uns on de yerth, but de chile hain't over heah, dat's one suah t'ing."

"Lavinia, are you telling me the truth?"

"Did yo' eber know me to lie to yer? Now I'se 'fended. Ah guess Ah better go."

"Try it, if you dare! Then the child can be saved?"

"Sabed! Sabed! Tell yer dar hain't nuffin' to sabe her from. Ef she hain't ober heah she mus' be on your side. Don't be a fool."

"But the mother has surely passed over."

"Mebbe yo' knows; Ah don't. Neber could get neah de stuck-up critter nohow. What mak's yo' t'ink she's went ober, Liza?"

"She threw herself into the water when the lightning struck the child."

"So? Mebbe she did. Want me to find out?"

"Indeed I do."

"Den hol' de force. May tak' some time. I dunno who bosses her. Mebbe I'se won't be let, but Ah'll try."

Silence followed. The darkness deepened; the moments passed; without, the storm raged more furiously than ever; the man failed to come.

Perhaps Liza felt growing impatience, but if so she expressed it by no sign.

At last came a quivering of the lips; again words—as distinctly uttered as if spoken by the average negress.

"She hain't heah."

"What? Impossible!"

"Tell yer she hain't heah, dat's all I know."

"Then it's a miracle!"

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout dat. I'se been to her people. Dey says, 'Not yet nor for many a long year to come.'"

"Well!"

"Want anyt'ing more, Liza? My strength is pretty near played out."

"No; I thank yo', Lavinia."

"Doan' mention it. Dat 'ar's mah bizness. Glad to obligo yo'. Nex' time yo' want me, gib me more of a show. Ah hate to come in a hurry, all mouf—lak' Ah was half-dressed. 'Tain't decent, nohow."

"You have served my purpose; but I hear footsteps. Better go before Rabineau comes. He won't understand spiritualism."

"I'se gwine; I'se gwine. By-by, honey. Doan' lak dis place, but Ah see yo' in a better one. Ah—— Hey! Hol' on, yo'. Jes' a chanst for another word."

None came.

The head vanished. An instant later the door opened and the man came bobbing in, followed by a blast of wind and rain.

"I've got here at last!" he gasped. "I've had a terrible time of it. Fell twice and—— Where's Adele? What ails the child?"

With the utmost calmness the woman related what had occurred, adding:

"Don't despair, Rabineau. I am certain the child is not dead, in spite of appearances. As for Adele, there is always hope; you know——"

He broke in upon her then, and the awful intensity which had come over his face relaxed.

"Hope! In that sea?" he groaned. "On such a night?"

It was a wail of despair.

The man sank to his knees and, burying his face in his hands, wept with all the bitterness of a child.

"To lose you now!" he moaned. "Oh, Adele! My love! My life! To lose you now, when at last I thought my time had come!"

CHAPTER TWO

1916—ZITANA'S DISAPPEARANCE

JACK PRYOR first read of the matter in *The Sun* on his way down-town. Owing to the pressure of war news it appeared only as an item and was given no prominent place, as it surely would have been at any other time. The item read:

ANOTHER MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

TUXEDO, December 28.—Mrs. Patrick Farley Carrigan gave a Christmas week-end dance at her home in the Park on Saturday night. Among the attractions was Zitana Mandeville, the famous blind ballet-dancer, who performed in her usual wonderful fashion under the direction of her manager, Professor Roscoe.

Shortly afterward Miss Mandeville was reported missing; the most persistent search failed to reveal her whereabouts. As the young lady is very helpless and quite incapable of going about alone, to say nothing of the fact that a severe snowstorm was raging at the time, the affair is most mysterious. Professor Roscoe is said to be nervously prostrated. We understand that the famous Detective Francis Fox has been engaged on the case. The solution, as is usual in such matters, will probably prove simple.

"The old man gets all the society plums," muttered Pryor, who was himself a detective. "I often wish I had taken up with his offer and gone in with him. It begins to look as if I should never do anything for myself."

Perhaps a badly chosen office location had a lot to do with Detective Pryor's non-success. Filled with the idea that the best place to make money in New York City, of which his knowledge was slight, was Wall Street and its vicinity, a cheap office in an old elevatorless building on lower Broad street was engaged. As might have been expected, during the year which followed clients were few and far between; but for the fact that he was not without resources, Jack Pryor would have starved.

But this, the 28th of December, was destined to mark a change, for Pryor had been in his office less than half an hour when a well-dressed young man entered. He bore every evidence of being a person of means, and his introduction was the laying of an engraved card on the detective's desk which read:

ARTHUR CLAYTON

"Mr. Pryor, I presume?" he at the same time said.

Detective Jack was on his dignity at once. "That's me," he answered, fumbling over a bunch of old letters as he spoke.

"Can you favor me with a few minutes of your time?"

"First let me finish reading my morning mail."

"Certainly."

"Be seated. You'll find the morning paper on the table. I shan't be long."

It was not likely. Many a time had those same letters served their purpose—to personate the mail which never came.

"If I must wait, I must," replied the young man quietly. "But time presses. I merely mention that I have come to you on detective business on the recommendation of Mr. Fox, who is too busy to personally undertake my case."

"Francis Fox?"

"Yes."

"Oh, that's different. I do a lot of business for Mr. Fox."

The visitor smiled.

"Pardon me," he said, "but if you are going to do business with me, we may as well be direct with each other. You don't know that Mr. Fox has told me all about you. You have plenty of time. Now, now, don't be offended. We may as well come to an understanding. Fox told me I would like you, and I'm sure I shall. Throw aside your attempt at dignity with those old letters and forget both, and let us come to business."

"With all my heart!" cried Pryor, captivated by the young man's personality. "Go ahead. I took you for a rich man."

"In other words a lobster. I am a rich man, but I deny any resemblance to the crustacean in question. Read that."

Drawing up a chair, Clayton threw a clipping from *The Sun* on the desk. It was the matter of the blind ballet-dancer's disappearance.

"I have already read it," said Jack, alive to the big possibilities in that case.

"Good! What's your first name?"

"Jack."

"Mine is Arthur. If we are to work together we must appear to have been long acquainted. Those names go."

"Very well. What do you want me to do?"

"To go by the afternoon train to Tuxedo. I shall write you

a pass on my card. Go direct to Mrs. Carrigan's. You will find me there ahead of you. We will take the matter up. Here are fifty dollars to cover incidental expenses. You'll be on hand?"

"I certainly shall."

"Settled. Good-day."

The next instant he was gone. The money on the desk was a very decided help to enable Jack Pryor to realize that the visit was a reality.

"I suppose I ought to have talked terms, but I just couldn't," he muttered. Had he but known it, he was not the only one by many who "just couldn't" when Arthur Clayton was talking.

Tuxedo is a place unique. There is nothing like it on the face of the earth. Ten square miles in the heart of the picturesque Ramapo Mountains, enclosed with barbed wire, it has been converted into a rich man's paradise. Here stand hundreds of villas and not a few veritable palaces; here is a lake, a large clubhouse, churches, a theater. Nothing is wanting that money can procure; to this it need only be added that of all Tuxedo's wonders nothing can be seen by the outside observer. Save two churches for the use of employees and servants, there is no house within a mile of the fence. A dense forest, permitted to remain in all its primitive wilderness, conceals all. The afternoon express does its forty miles an hour, and lands its passengers at Tuxedo Gate at six. Jack alighted to find himself facing a scene of bustle and gaiety as unexpected as it was stirring. A huge gateway, with its accompanying lodge, built of rough granite blocks, rose before him, the whole being brilliantly illuminated by electric lights, many in colors. Through its open portals expensive cars and stylish horses were moving in both directions. Millionaires were in evidence by dozens. There was no mistaking them.

For a moment the young detective stood irresolute. He had been talking with a gentleman's valet on the train. He was up against trouble, and knew it. The question was how to get around the snag.

Walking to the office at the gate, he boldly entered.

A supercilious man confronted him. "Well?" was demanded in a tone sufficiently frigid to down any poor person.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Clayton," said Jack. "May I enter the park?"

"Have you a pass from Mr. Clayton?"

"Unfortunately he forgot to give me one."

"Then you can't enter."

"But the matter is of the highest importance to Mr. Clayton. May I telephone?"

"No."

"Perhaps you will?"

"No; we do not call members to the telephone on slight pretense. This is a private club."

This reply brought out Jack's last trump.

"I don't know what your name may be," he said, "but that card states mine and my business. Mr. Clayton told me to wait on him here at this hour, and—oh, here he is now."

The relief was unspeakable when Arthur walked into the office.

"Hello, Jack!" he cried. "Say, I went away without leaving you the pass. Careless of me. Our rules are very strict."

"So I find," answered Jack dryly. "This gentleman has made it perfectly plain."

"It's all right, Paton," said Arthur lightly. "Let my old friend Pryor pass at any time."

"Certainly, Mr. Clayton," was the reply accompanied by a rubbing of the hands and a subservient smile.

"My car is outside," continued Arthur. "Come on, old man. I'll whisk you up to the house in no time."

It was before one of the palaces that the car drew up. The distance from the gate was five miles and a half, Arthur told Jack.

"This is my aunt's house," he added; "father's sister. Tell you more about her later. Pay no attention to her ill manners and bad English. She's a kindly old soul at heart."

"Just one question," returned Jack. "Can it be possible that she is in any way interested in having Miss Mandeville disappear?"

"Absolutely no!"

"That's all."

"You'll say so when you see her. Fox was to call you up at eight and give you a few tips. Oh, say, do you prefer to go to the regular dinner-table, or dine with me, solus, in my den? I can lend you an evening dress-suit."

"Solus, decidedly," laughed Jack. "Frankly, I have yet to put on my first dress-suit."

Arthur's laugh had a hearty ring which won Jack completely. It was fine to meet a real gentleman. As for himself, he was merely the product of a country town. Under twenty-five, he had seen very little of the world and knew less of human nature. That he had utterly mistaken his calling he had yet to learn; yet, to the lame and lazy, God is good. Arthur Clayton had made no mistake in following the advice of Francis Fox. Where the famous detective himself would probably have failed this callow country youth was destined to succeed and to be a living witness to mysteries far beyond the capacity of his feeble brain.

The dinner served in Arthur's elegantly furnished den was a revelation to Jack. Wine and spirits were placed before him; to Arthur's relief, he refused to touch either. Cigars came at the end. While they were smoking Jack asked his second question.

"Why have you interested yourself in this matter?" he said abruptly.

"For my aunt's sake," replied Arthur promptly; then in a voice full of emotion he added:

"But primarily, my dear boy, because I have never loved but one girl in my life. She is Zitana Mandeville, the blind ballet-dancer!"

CHAPTER THREE

AN ANCIENT CLUE

THE declaration of Arthur Clayton came as a surprise to Jack, for the reason that only twice had he alluded to the vanished artiste by name. Not knowing what answer might be expected of him, he remained silent. Arthur, after a moment's pause, continued:

"I'll tell you how it all happened; but first, how familiar are you with doings in New York society?"

"As a matter of fact, I know nothing at all about it," Jack confessed.

"I suspected as much. To cut it as short as possible, this blind girl is a pupil of the famous ballet-master Professor Roscoe. She has never appeared in public—that is in a theater or hall—but has confined her dancing to private circles. You can imagine how expert and popular she is when I tell you that her price is a thousand dollars a night. I have known her personally for about a year and have learned to love her. I believe myself to be about the only society man whom the professor has permitted to make her acquaintance. There is, however, one other. When performing, she never speaks. As soon as her dance is over the professor takes her to a private room, where no one is ever allowed to see her. It was from such a room in this house that she vanished. The professor locked her in and carried the key. When he opened the door an hour later she had vanished. There is but one door to the room, which is on the third floor; besides that, a snowstorm raging outside! It is impossible to imagine how the thing could have happened, but happen it did."

"Of course, the whole house was searched?"

"Sure; not only once but again and again. Not a trace of Zitana could be discovered. Of course, the professor went wild. He is an excitable Southerner. You can fancy his feelings from a financial standpoint alone. The girl has been a gold mine to him."

"Is he in the house now?"

"No; he returned to New York with me this morning. I'll put you in touch with him, however. I want you to interview him."

"Then you have only his word for it that Miss Mandeville really did vanish?"

"That is all; but I assure you it is quite sufficient. Roscoe regards Zitana in the light of a grandchild, though I understand she is actually no blood relation to him."

"Is she hopelessly blind?"

"I have had six of the best oculists in America examine her eyes. They all concur that such is the case. In spite of that, Roscoe persists in believing that she will ultimately recover her sight."

"Was she born blind?"

"Oh, no; up to her third year her sight was perfect. At that time she was struck by lightning and given up for dead. When she revived she was blind."

"But——"

The abrupt opening of the door interrupted them. A stout, over-dressed, middle-aged woman came bustling into the room after the fashion of the proverbial bull in the china shop, overturning the smoking-table, smashing an expensive tobacco-jar and scattering pipe and cigar ashes over the carpet.

"Great Scott, aunty! Don't knock me over!" cried Arthur.

"Sure, your room is that cluttered up one can't get about in it without upsetting things," retorted the woman. "I didn't know you had company. Why didn't you ask the gentleman to dinner?"

"We preferred to dine here."

"I see you did. The floor is all over crumbs; but say, aren't you going to introduce me?"

"Certainly. This is my old friend Mr. Pryor; Jack, my aunt, Mrs. Carrigan."

"Sure, it's glad I am to meet youse!" cried the woman, extending a fat, red hand. "Any friend of me nephew's is always welcome under me roof. They shan't starve you at breakfast, bye; I won't stand for it. I'd make more of a fuss about it now if it wasn't that I am that worrit over the disappearance of the dancing gal that I hardly know which end I'm on. I—— Bother, there goes the telephone. Believe me, I wouldn't have one in my room."

Arthur answered the call.

"It's Fox asking for you, Jack," he announced.

"And it's precisely eight o'clock," replied Jack, glancing at his watch.

"He is very exact," said Arthur; and then into the phone: "Hold the wire, please. He is here and coming to speak to you."

The first Jack caught was, "You, Pryor?"

"Yes."

"Don't answer in any words which can give a clue to my talk."

"All right."

"It was in my power to throw this important case your way, and I propose to see you win it."

"Thanks."

"Now I'm going to give you a few tips. This isn't the first mysterious disappearance case which has occurred in that house, but the third; it's the first in Mrs. Carrigan's time, however."

"Yes."

"Find out if the house still belongs to Mrs. Duval. Just answer yes, that I may know you get me."

"Yes."

"Search the room thoroughly in which the disappearance took place. Every inch of floor and wall space. Its secret has eluded me, but you may be more fortunate."

"All right."

"Keep any discoveries you may make to yourself."

"I will."

"That's all. Good-by."

"Good-by."

"Satisfactory?" demanded Arthur as Jack hung up the receiver.

"Fairly so. Where is your aunt?"

"I got rid of her. What do you think of the old lady?"

"Oh, that's not for me to say."

"Yes, it is. You think what everybody else does, that she's uneducated, and so she is. All the same, she's worth millions."

"How did she get it?"

"Oh, Uncle Pat made his start keeping a saloon over on First avenue. Tammany and Wall Street did the rest. He only left thirty millions when he died."

"Any children?"

"Not one. Oh, yes; the will is drawn. I'm sole heir. Might be worse; but what did Fox have to say?"

"I am to search the room alone in which the disappearance took place."

"Why alone?"

"He didn't say."

"All right. Want to go now?"

"Yes, if you please. If I follow directions you will find things pretty well pulled about after I'm through."

"That will be all right. Leave them for the servants to straighten."

"I want to ask one question. Who is the other fellow you alluded to who is after Zitana?"

The door opened and a man of about thirty entered the room.

"Here he is now," Arthur wrote on a pad and pushed it over to Jack. "I shan't introduce you."

"I sa-ay, Arthur, I was wanting to speak with you, but you didn't get down to dinner," said the visitor, speaking with an affected accent.

"No; I was busy here."

"Aw—I see. Anything doing? Did you confer with the detective?"

"I expect to see him to-morrow."

"Aw, yes. Well, in that case I should say by the looks of things the madam had been here."

"She has."

"Aw, yes; with your permission I'll help myself to a weed. Yours are always good."

"Go ahead."

He took not only one, but six from the box and departed.

"There goes the one person I suspect of having a hand in the mysterious disappearance business," said Arthur in a whisper, "and yet I may wrong the fellow."

"What's his name?" demanded Jack.

"Ralph Ringwood. You will open your eyes when I tell you that he is a nephew of Madam Duval on her husband's side, and her sole heir."

"Do you mean the rich Madam Duval?"

"No one else; the ten-million-dollar dowager. As for Ralph, I don't believe he has the faintest idea what his aunt is worth. If you want to know more about him——"

"I do; but frankly I'd rather wait till I've searched that room."

"And so you shall," replied Arthur, rising. "Follow me."

The room to which the detective was conducted proved to be a large, well-furnished bed-chamber in the rear of the house on the floor below.

As Arthur turned on the electric light Jack inquired whose room it was.

"Guest-chamber," was the reply. "Nobody wants to sleep in it. Said to be haunted. Aunt Biddy believes in such dope."

Jack stood silent.

"And so you want to be left alone?" asked Arthur rather disappointedly.

"If you please."

"You shall have your way. I am only following Mr. Fox's orders."

"Oh, in that case it's all right. So-long; you can find your way to my den, I guess."

Jack locked the door after him and took a view out of all the windows. The room appeared to be located in the rear. Two windows overlooked a rocky precipice against which the house was built. The space between the outer wall and the rocks was only a few feet. Jack now pulled up the carpet and proceeded to examine the floor. Nothing came of it. The same result accompanied his examination of the walls.

It certainly seemed discouraging. Utterly at a loss to think what his next step ought to be, he leaned against the end of the big open fireplace. If so famous a detective as Francis Fox had failed, how could he hope to succeed?

He slightly shifted his position. All at once he found himself sprawling on his back, not outside the chimney, but inside. Unwittingly he had pressed a secret spring.

Jack scrambled up and looked about him. He stood in a narrow apartment behind the brick fireplace back. The only means of entrance was the secret panel of which even now the detective could not understand the mechanism. A dark,

narrow flight of stairs led downward. Drawing out his flashlight, Jack descended to the level of the floor below, where he found himself in a room which seemed to possess neither window nor door. The walls and floor were carpeted with dust, in which were footprints of recent origin, both sets large, and evidently those of men. Furniture there was none save an old table and two chairs, but there were many trunks and packing-boxes scattered about. Jack attacked one of the trunks, which proved not to be locked. For a few minutes he stood rummaging its contents; then, suddenly straightening up, he muttered:

"By Jove! I've struck a clue!"

But had he? It was a paper, yellow with age, which he held in his hand. For the first time Jack observed this fact. He glanced down the sheet, which was closely pen-written.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "This thing is no good. It dates back to 1872."

But he read on to learn better. The paper was of the utmost importance in the present issue, in spite of the fact that it was so ancient a clue.

CHAPTER FOUR

OFF ON THE YACHT

"WHAT a truly magnificent yacht," was the remark of more than one observer who saw Arthur Clayton's *La Zitana* sail down New York Bay.

Jack Pryor agreed with them. Although his experience with the yachts of rich men had been extremely limited, he could see as soon as he came aboard that no money had been spared here to bring about a rare combination of elegance and comfort.

A week had passed since the discovery of that ancient clue at Tuxedo, which was the immediate cause of Clayton undertaking a trip to New Orleans on the yacht he had named for the missing ballet-dancer.

Other clues had been discovered. Concerning none of them did Arthur know anything. This by the advice of Francis Fox over the telephone.

"Keep your own counsel," the great detective had said. "Tell him nothing until you are fairly started. Then be guided by existing circumstances as to how much you tell him. He is young, hot-headed and in love. Such people are unsafe to trust with secrets. Beware!"

Jack followed this good advice.

"I have discovered things. It is necessary to go to New Orleans," was all he would say when he and Arthur met after the search.

Urging had no effect on him. The result was that Jack rose in his millionaire employer's estimation as a detective. Wise old fox! If he did not know the detective business when no one did. The fact was he really needed an assistant, and was trying Jack out at Clayton's expense.

The *La Zitana* sailed at three o'clock. When Jack came aboard he was received by the Japanese steward Yama, who showed him every attention. He saw nothing of Arthur until six, when his host presented himself outside the stateroom-door and asked if he might come in.

"Surely," replied Jack. "I was wondering when I was going to see you."

"I wanted to give you a chance to get settled," replied Arthur, lighting a cigarette. "Will you smoke?"

"I don't care for cigarettes."

"Try this cigar. It isn't half bad. I can always talk better when I'm smoking; don't know how it may be with you."

"The same to a certain extent."

"I suppose now that we are fairly started you will tell me the excuse for this trip."

"That depends. I understand from the steward that you and I are not alone on this yacht."

"Which is true; worse luck, I just couldn't help it. Ringwood wanted to go and take a lady with him. I felt that I could not refuse."

"I had not heard of the lady. Who is she?"

"You have heard of Sally Fantime, the famous movie star who is supposed to make a hundred a minute—five hundred a week is her real salary, I understand."

"I have seen her in the pictures."

"And don't think much of her, I judge from your tone."

"Honestly, I don't consider her deserving of the publicity she has had."

"My view; at the same time she is a very beautiful and fascinating woman."

"Is Ringwood engaged to her?"

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "I know nothing of their relations, and care less," he answered. "They are much together—too much for Ralph's good, I fancy. Look out you don't fall into her clutches. As for me, I could marry her to-morrow for the asking. She's a Mrs. Walker, with a husband lying around loose somewhere. Children, too, perhaps. I don't know. She'd get a divorce to nab me."

As Jack continued to listen, his determination was taken. He would not reveal his hand to Arthur until they found themselves alone. But Arthur had come for no other purpose than to learn of the detective's discoveries.

"Fire away, boy," he said. "Surely you will tell me what started you on this dash now?"

"Not yet; at least, not all," replied Jack. "I can only say that I discovered several clues. Titana was taken from that room by two men by way of a secret passage which leads through the hill behind the house and under the fence outside the park. There she was put into a limousine on runners and carried off in the storm."

"You know this to be a fact?"

"I do."

"Where was she taken to?"

"That I do not know, but I have every reason to believe that I know her ultimate destination, and that's where I am heading for."

"Tell me, Jack."

"No; it isn't good detective business. If we were alone on this yacht it would be different, but with a man of whom you hold no good opinion, and a fascinating woman of doubtful standing associated with us, it would be extremely foolish for me to give up an important clue, especially after your telling me that at times you have suspected Ralph Ringwood to be at the bottom of the dancer's disappearance."

"You are right," replied Arthur after a brief silence. "I see it now. Don't tell."

"I don't intend to, but I want you to tell me something, and that is, all you know about Ringwood's rich aunt, Mrs. Duval."

Arthur smiled. "He will be a wise man indeed who can tell you much about that woman," he said. "She is certainly enormously wealthy and as stingy as she is rich—that's about all any one knows."

"Even Ringwood?"

"Even Ringwood. His aunt has absolutely no use for him. She will not receive him nor ever speak to him over the phone. The only person supposed to have the least insight into her affairs are her lawyers. In New York she employs the big legal firm of Hight & Howell. In New Orleans, I understand there is a very old man named Bassier, who has been attorney for the Duval family for three generations. Ralph has done his best to get next to this individual, but has failed."

"Is Mrs. Duval capable of managing her own affairs?"

"You bet she is. There isn't a shrewder business woman in America. Her knowledge of the stock market is a marvel. She is president of three New York banks, whose stock she absolutely controls."

"Charitable?"

"Not in the least. Never gives anything away."

"Extravagant as to her living?"

"Just the reverse. Sometimes she ties up at one of the second-rate hotels; sometimes at another. She is said to spend less than two hundred a month, on an average."

"Any children?"

"No."

"Has her husband been long dead?"

"For many years."

"She was present at Mrs. Carrigan's the night Zitana vanished, according to the list of guests?"

"She was. Say, Jack, you are surely not attempting to work up a theory that Mrs. Duval had anything to do with the affair?"

"No."

"That would be too absurd. By the way, Duval has done the disappearance act herself since that night."

"What do you mean?"

"I am alluding to the woman's most peculiar characteristic. She will remain around New York for a year or two and then suddenly vanish. She has done it again and again. There is no telling how long she may be absent. It may be only a matter of weeks. Usually it is a matter of months. Once she was gone for five years."

"And no one knows where she goes, or why?"

"Absolutely no one. Ralph has spent thousands of dollars on detectives trying to find out. The result has invariably been failure."

"Singular. How do her business connections reach her?"

"Through her lawyers, who will reveal nothing. It is Ralph's belief that they know nothing."

"On what day did she vanish this time?"

"January first. She had been around New York for just two years. Before that she had been gone six months."

Jack became silent. The ancient clue was confirmed. He spoke the truth when he said that he was not trying to work up a theory concerning Mrs. Duval. He felt that he held absolute proof that she was concerned in the matter, in fact, directly responsible for it. But why? As yet the detective had no idea.

"Come, let's go on deck," said Arthur, rising.

"Meet you there in ten minutes," was the reply. "Let's see, I think you said that Professor Roscoe had gone to New Orleans by train and would meet us there?"

"Yes; I invited him to make the trip with us, but he gets horribly sea-sick, and so declined."

Arthur left the stateroom. Ten minutes later Jack came out upon deck to find himself in the presence of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

A bolt of fire suddenly appeared on the table, followed by a deafening crash outside.

CHAPTER FIVE

WATCHING

JACK acknowledged Arthur's introduction to the famous movie star with an awkward bow. He was but little used to ladies' society, although as susceptible as most men of his age to female charms. One thing, however, he was not in the least capable of discerning, and that was how much of what he saw was real and how much aided by those arts which women of the "profession" know so well.

The yacht was now well out at sea. Madam, wrapped in her furs, looked perfectly comfortable, as did Arthur, but Jack, who was not as warmly dressed as he should have been, was decidedly cold.

"Draw up a chair and sit down, Jack," said Arthur. "Sally wants to know you. She is a born collector; she collects millionaires. She was wild to know you as soon as she heard you were one."

The woman gave Jack a peculiar glance, but said nothing.

The detective was sure that she had not been deceived. He felt very young. But Madam Sally knew her business and went right at it.

"Ever been in New Orleans before, Mr. Pryor?" she asked.

"Never," replied Jack, sure that his face was reddening under her searching gaze.

"On the whole it is a charming city, although much of its former quaint picturesqueness has disappeared in these latter years. You will like it. There is a lot to see."

"The first thing which will strike you is that the Mississippi is way above the street level," rattled Arthur. "It always makes strangers open their eyes to see steamers and ships up in the air. By the way, there are a lot of the latter still in evidence; you seldom see them now in New York."

"I've seen quite a few since the war began," ventured Jack.

"That's so, too. Ever seen pictures of how the New York rivers used to look half a century ago?" asked Arthur.

"Never."

"They are well worth looking at," chimed in Sally. "I have quite a collection of them, which I keep to show to my millionaires. You must let me show them to you, Mr. Pryor, when we get back to New York."

"It will be a pleasure to be anticipated," replied Jack. Again he was sure he had said the wrong thing, and felt younger than ever.

Arthur laughed inwardly. "What a gawk the fellow is, to be sure," he said to himself. "I wonder if he really has caught a clue?"

Ralph Ringwood now appeared, which let Jack out, much to his relief. Soon the dinner-gong sounded and all hands adjourned to the table. The meal was by long odds the finest Jack had ever eaten. By Arthur's suggestion he had provided himself with a dress-suit, so there was no awkwardness on that score, but he made no attempt to enter into the conversation, which did not interest him in the least. Arthur, however, played the host to perfection, although he despised Ringwood. As for Madam Sally, she made herself at home.

That evening Arthur retired early. Ringwood and his companion started a game of bridge for money. Relieved at not being asked to join, Jack put on an extra coat and went on deck, where he picked up the acquaintance of Captain Kellerman, the master of the yacht, with whom he enjoyed half an hour's talk. The captain going below then, Jack began pacing the deck. As he was passing the cabin skylight, one sash of which had been opened for ventilation, he heard the woman's voice distinctly say:

"What makes you think he is a detective?"

On the alert at once, Jack halted and stood listening.

"I don't think it. I know it," was Ringwood's reply. "I took the trouble to dig up his record before we left New York."

"So? Here on our account?"

"I don't think it; still, it may be so. Clayton hates me. He would have refused to let me accompany him if he had dared."

"You have a hold on him? A matter of blackmail?"

"Oh, no; not that. Just that he don't want to break with me any more than I do with him."

"Do you think he has any suspicion of your real reason for going to New Orleans?"

"No, I don't. I have no idea that he has. Have you formed any plan yet?"

"No definite plan, but if, as you suspect, this fellow really has discovered a clue to the secret of your aunt's mysterious absences, you may trust me to get it out of him. I shall not fail."

The talk drifted to bridge. Suddenly Madam Sally broke loose again.

"How did you find out?"

"Through Arthur. You know what a gabber he is. Can't keep a secret if he tries."

"Yes, I know. There you have it, boy. The ace of spades."

Jack listened long, but heard no more. He was glad he had heard that much to put him on his guard.

"She'll get nothing out of me, blame her," he inwardly boasted. "I'm wise to her game."

But he had a shrewd, dangerous woman to deal with, and next day he had his hands full. But for the fact that he was posted, Jack might easily have mistaken Madam Sally's attentions for genuine love-making. As it was, he, of course, was not to be deceived, although there were times when he found it hard to believe that the actress was playing a part. Not a word did he say to Arthur about the matter. That evening he was listening at the skylight again. It was a full hour before he heard anything, but at last it came. Ringwood started it by asking his companion how she had made out.

"Why, not so very well, I must admit, Ralph," she replied. "The fellow acted as if he was afraid of me."

"Yes; I noticed that."

"Do you think he suspected?"

"No; I think two things. First, he is shrewder than I thought; second, he is not used to women of your sort. You went at him too brazenly, and consequently scared him."

"Come! I like that. What's the matter with me?"

"Pshaw! What's the use? There's nobody here but me."

"You've got a nerve, I must say, to talk like that. Never mind. I'll try it on again to-morrow."

"Take my advice and draw it a shade milder. You will do well to remember that the fellow is little more than a boy."

"Did you try it with Arthur?"

"Oh, yes. He knows nothing, I am certain."

This ended it.

"You don't get me, beautiful as you are," thought Jack when he found himself locked in his stateroom. "All the same, I must put the clue where she cannot possibly get her hands on it."

CHAPTER SIX

STRANGE DREAMS

DURING the first part of the night Jack was exceedingly restless. It was hot; he could not bear the weight of the covers, and finally threw off everything. At last, after he had given up all hope of sleep, it came to him and he dreamed. He dreamt he was lying there in the stateroom and could not sleep. Arthur entered. "What's the matter?" he asked. "I can't sleep." "So? I can easily fix that. What you need is company. Wait." Enter Madam Sally, radiant in her beauty. "You poor boy! Can't sleep? I can fix that. Just give me that old letter and I will give you something in return which will make the slumber of the Seven Sleepers a cat-nap alongside the sleep which shall come to you."

For the moment it seemed to Jack that he must yield. Then suddenly a beautiful girl stood before him. He seemed to know instinctively that she was the blind ballet-dancer. "Refuse, or you are lost," she said, and Madam Sally did not appear to hear or even see her.

He refused. The instant vanishing of both women followed. So ran the dream.

Again it came. This time the scene was the cabin of the yacht. Ralph Ringwood, intoxicated, was lying on a couch. Arthur was in an easy-chair, holding Madam Sally in his arms. Love-making on both sides went on. Jack, able to read motives, knows that the desire to possess the clue alone instigates Madam Sally's actions. With Arthur it is a case of hypnotism. He is lost. He has forgotten his Zitana. "What can be done to save him?" Jack dreamed. Again the blind dancer appeared. "I shall save him," she said quietly. "Dream on. He is safe in my hands."

The next dream was of a river with a morass on either side. The yacht was moving slowly forward. Instinctively the dreamer knows that Ringwood and the movie actress are no longer on board. Arthur paces the deck. The dreamer can read his thoughts. They are fixed upon the blind girl alone.

Still the river, but the yacht has come to a standstill.

Before them tower two huge human figures. Between the figures are gates equally high, all overgrown with Spanish moss, hanging in vast clusters. Arthur points eagerly. "How are we ever to pass those gates?" he seems to say. The dreamer responds, "The clue." He is searching for the letter. Where, is not plain. It is not where it should be. It cannot be found. Arthur says nothing. He looks guilty. Suddenly alongside appears another yacht. On the deck are Ringwood and Madam Sally, who holds the ancient letter in her hands. "Look, boys!" she cried. "I win. You two are a pair of fools."

And the dream runs on to a finish. Again the blind ballet girl comes. She looks lovingly at Arthur, but addresses Jack. "Trust me. All will end well in spite of alarming appearances. Fear not imprisonment, fear not threats of a horrible death. Strong spirits guard you. The days of my torture are over. It is well that I was abducted and brought to Maison Rouge, which lies beyond those gates. Be good to my more than father, for he has been very good to me." All vanish. The dreamer now is in the stateroom again. A little man, well advanced in years, comes hobbling in.

"It's time to wake up, boy," he says. "Listen; all sorts of queer things are going to happen to you. Fear none of them. Your spirit band can easily control every adverse spirit which may be set upon you. Besides, there is mine to help. I love Zitana as I loved her mother before her. There is a God above all." And Jack awoke.

The sun was shining brightly into the stateroom. Night had come, but every detail of the dream was as vivid as though he had seen each screened in some moving picture show the night before. The young detective sprang from the bed and felt for the clue. It was where he had hidden it in his trousers.

"Strange!" muttered Jack. "In all my life I never had a dream so realistic before."

He was not more than half-dressed when Arthur's knock was heard and he admitted him.

"Just getting up?" said Clayton. "I thought no one was ever going to. Have you any idea what time it is?"

"None; my watch has run down."

"Half-past nine. Breakfast has been ready an hour, and Yama is in despair. In Ringwood's case I'm not surprised, nor do I envy him in the beautiful head he is sure to have this morning. It's the delirium for him if he don't quit putting away the champagne as he has been doing. Even Madam Sally is becoming disgusted."

"I hadn't observed," replied Jack.

"Naturally not. He don't begin till after you've turned in. He was awfully full last night."

"He don't interest me. I could never like him. When shall we get to New Orleans?"

"Day after to-morrow. I could have made much better

time, but Madam Sally has not been well lately and Ralph asked me as a favor to give her a little longer on the water. Do you think she is beautiful, Jack?"

"Pretty as a picture."

"Ever see her on the screen?"

"Many times; and you?"

"I am free to admit that I never saw a more beautiful creature."

"But Zitana?"

"Oh, that's altogether different. Hers is a more spiritual beauty. You've no idea how good she is and how carefully she has been brought up. In fact, she is a saint."

"And Madam Sally?"

"Is certainly not a saint from whatever angle you view her," laughed Arthur.

"What is Zitana's last name? I can't remember that you ever mentioned it."

"I never did for the excellent reason that I don't know it. She don't know it herself. She goes by the name of Roscoe privately. 'Mandeville' the professor calls her in the circular he issues. He told me that neither of these is her true name. He will not speak of her history, back of her third year, when she became blind. She must have come of good stock, though. Her face shows it."

"I am curious to meet the professor," said Jack. "I've got a picture of the man in my mind. I suppose it isn't any way accurate."

"Tell me what it is and I'll soon settle that point."

As accurately as if he had stood in the room with them Jack was able to describe the lame man who figured in the last episode of the dream.

Arthur seemed considerably impressed. "You have certainly described Roscoe," he said. "You say you never saw the man?"

"Never."

"Ever see his picture? It has appeared in the papers many times."

"Not once."

"Odd! Are you anything in the way of a clairvoyant, spiritualist, or anything of that sort?"

"I know nothing of such matters. Do you?"

"Oh, I've dipped into spiritualism and attended seances same as I've mussed with everything else. All a fraud. You've hit it close in the case of the professor, all the same. Just accident, I suppose. But come on, I'm perishing with hunger. We'll eat, whatever the others may do."

Madam Sally did not appear until after eleven. The afternoon was well advanced before Ringwood showed himself on deck. Jack did not fail to notice that Arthur was becoming more and more attentive to the movie star, who appeared to make a joke of it. On the contrary, she kept making big eyes at the young detective himself. Just as Jack was going to bed Arthur entered and, closing the door, said:

"Jack, I want to see that clue. I have a right to demand it. You are in my pay, and have no right to keep something discovered in my aunt's house concealed from me."

"That's certainly one way of putting it," replied Jack quietly. "Still, I must decline."

"You vex me beyond measure."

"I am very sorry for it."

"Are you acting under Fox's orders?"

"Under his direct orders."

Arthur bit his lip. "I don't know that they should bind me. I'm not paying Fox."

Jack was silent. "Once and for all: Will you show me the clue?"

"Once and for all I will not at the present time, and you'd know how right I am if you knew what I know."

"What do you know?"

"Oh, I'm not telling."

"Where do we go after we leave New Orleans?"

"I'll explain later."

"I've a great mind to discharge you."

"That's your privilege, sir."

"We'll see," snapped Arthur, and he angrily left the stateroom.

That night Jack again changed the hiding-place of the clue.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FOILING A SIREN

ALL that afternoon Ringwood continued to put away La Veuve Cliquot. He lay in a steamer-chair when dinner was announced. Madam Sally certainly did a turn at her best acting if her appearance of disgust was not genuine. She designated Ralph as a pig, a brute, a loafer, a fool. All this was confided to Jack in the most friendly fashion. She scarcely looked at Arthur, who sat through the meal silent and glum.

"Of course, you are aware, Mr. Pryor, that the man has no income of his own," Madam Sally went on to say. "He travels on his expectations. The Duval estate is believed to be worth upwards of $10,000,000. Madam Duval cannot keep it from Ralph. If he lives he surely must inherit. Meanwhile, the woman, who is rich and mean, will have absolutely nothing to do with Ringwood. As he never works, you can imagine how he lives."

"How?" demanded Jack with assumed innocence. He was learning.

"Oh, you're too new!" growled Arthur.

"On his friends," answered Madam Sally. "Fools! When he finally does come in for his money they'll never see a cent. I am one of the fools."

"The others are all gentlemen, I suppose?" said Jack rather enjoying poking a little fun at her.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Arthur.

"No; they are mostly women," answered the actress. "No! but what there are some men among them; but I'm cutting it out for good and all." Then she added: "This is my last lap. I shall shake him in New Orleans."

Jack got a look that might have aroused a brass image. Arthur's face grew darker than ever. Then he did a really mean thing.

"Say, Sally," he drawled, "it isn't right to deceive you. I'll let you into a secret. Friend Jack here is not a millionaire as I pretended, but only a poor detective. As you only collect millionaire——"

"I want nothing to do with him? Is that what you are driving at? Many thanks for the warning, Mr. Clayton," she replied coolly, "but I already knew it. Ralph looked up his record before we left New York. You are quite mistaken in assuming that my collection is confined solely to millionaires. There have been many exceptions. Ralph himself, for instance. There may be others. I am still popular with the public and do precisely as I please."

Arthur bit his lip and remained silent. Jack held his face as immobile as possible. Whether he deceived the woman or not he was unable to tell. At all events, her attentions and Arthur's ill temper were still in full swing when he retired for the night.

He hung a towel over the lock at the door and another over the ventilator. The stateroom was elegantly furnished. A soft carpet covered the floor, which was not nailed, but secured to pegs by brass rings. Over in one corner Jack spied a knot-hole. "The very thing," he thought. He wrapped the letter in an envelope, securing it by an elastic band. To this he tied a piece of thread as near the color of the envelope as possible and lowered the letter through the knot-hole, making the thread secure to one of the pegs. In restoring the carpet he left two of the rings off the pegs on that side, and then turned in.

Long he lay awake to come up with another adventure later. This time it was no dream. He was suddenly aroused by a low knocking on the door.

"I'm awake! who's there?" responded Jack. The answer came in a woman's voice through the key-hole:

"It is I, Sally. Don't open the door. I'm in deep trouble. Will you come to my stateroom in ten minutes? I need you, Jack. The delay will give me time to dress."

"Why, yes," replied Jack, feeling that it would be bad detective business to refuse.

Jack hustled on shirt and trousers, and, entering the cabin, stole noiselessly to Madam Sally's stateroom, which was at the other end. He saw that the door must be open, for a faint red light streamed forth.

There was Madam Sally.

"I had given you up," she breathed. "Isn't it a great deal more than ten minutes? I came to the conclusion that you didn't have the courage to help a lone woman in distress. Come in and close the door."

"Close—the—door!" faltered Jack.

"Yes; I'm afraid of Ringwood. Bolt the door. We must not disturb Mr. Clayton, who has been as cross as two sticks all the evening. As for Ringwood, he's fuller than ever. It's something fierce. Three times I've had to slam the door in his face. Why don't you get a move on? I'm trusting you."

"The first episode of my dream!" thought Jack.

It came to him like a flash; it gave him strength. He faced the movie star with a sarcastic smile.

"And what am I expected to do after I've closed the door?" he calmly asked.

The look she shot at him was a study.

"You are to stay here till daylight and protect me from that drunken beast," she slowly replied.

"What if I refuse?"

She sprang to her feet and made a rush for the door. Doubtless she would have fastened it had she been given the chance. Jack dodged outside.

"So you defy me!" she hissed, her face all distorted. "I've made it hot many a time for better boys than you. You will be lucky if you ever see New York again."

"Oh, I'll take a chance on that," retorted Jack lightly. "Go to sleep, my dear. Pleasant dreams. I'll go back to my bed. If Ringwood comes and you really do want him thrown out, why, just shout and you'll find yours truly on the job."

He went back to his room and locked his door.

"Gee!" he murmured; "but thank God for the dream."

No thanks for his spirit friends. Yet Jack Pryor had a mother in spirit life, a sister, and a brother who died as an infant. But then, the young man knew nothing of such matters, and cared less. His spirit friends might have reached him in many ways had it been otherwise. As it was, they had chosen the best available under existing conditions. Jack had remembered his dream.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LOSS OF THE CLUE

"WE shall make New Orleans by to-morrow night," remarked Arthur when Jack answered the breakfast-gong. "We should hit the mouth of the Mississippi some time to-day, but we may be detained there."

"I shall be glad to get to the end of the voyage," returned Jack gravely.

Arthur gave him a queer look. "I heard quite a lot of noise in the night," he said. "People talking. Did you?"

"Yes; I took it to be Ringwood, still drunk."

"Probably you are right. Sit down. I don't propose to delay my breakfast all the morning as I did yesterday. The others can come when they are good and ready, for all me."

Madam Sally appeared shortly. She was as lovely as ever, and displayed no trace of the excitement of the night, except that her attentions to Jack were reduced to a minimum, although she was perfectly friendly. Arthur she undertook to draw out, and did.

Immediately after breakfast Jack returned to his stateroom. He had examined for the clue upon awakening, and found it intact. He also discovered that all rings were now on the pegs. Some one had surely been in his room while he slept. A certain drowsiness which was upon him when he awoke, and a slight odor in the stateroom made it look as if he had been chloroformed.

Again, Ringwood appeared to be intoxicated. That he was playing a part Jack felt certain. Not once did he see the man drink the wine, but he took bottle after bottle from the buffet and carried it into his stateroom. The detective could hear him pouring. Each time he came out he was a little worse.

Madam Sally scarcely noticed him. On the other hand, she appeared to have completely fascinated Arthur. Once, while she was absent from the deck for a few minutes, Jack ventured a remonstrance.

"Arthur," he said, "I hope you will excuse me, but have you forgotten Zitana and our mission?"

Arthur flushed and gave a start. "You will do well to mind your own business," he snapped.

"Thank you," replied Jack. "I shall certainly follow your advice."

"You will get your pay as promised, Pryor," Arthur continued, "but when we reach New Orleans you may consider yourself discharged. A man who——"

The return of Madam Sally put a stop to the conversation at this point. Jack immediately pulled out. He did not speak again to Arthur, nor did he again come to the table. Asking Yama to serve him in the stateroom, under pretense of a headache, it was done. He retired early, having proved the safety of the letter.

Again Jack was awakened during the night without apparent cause. He could hear no sound. His watch told him that it was two o'clock. He felt strongly impelled to go out into the cabin, and did.

The red light still shone in Madam Sally's stateroom. Jack tiptoed to where he could get a view through the open door. Instantly the detective pulled away, regained his own stateroom, and as the yacht steamed on through the turbid waters of the Mississippi, Jack knew that the second episode of his dream stood fulfilled. He made no attempt to sleep again, but bolted his door, lit a cigarette and waited for what he felt was sure to come.

It came! Three times the door was tried. The detective was fighting hard to preserve the ancient clue. He succeeded. That night they reached New Orleans. Jack was promptly paid off and discharged. He received his dismissal in silence and then spent part of his pay for a half-hour's talk with Detective Fox over the long-distance telephone.

Asking for instructions, he was told to go right ahead on his own account, and informed that he would find a credit of five thousand dollars at a certain bank. This sent the detective to bed happy, for he had become deeply interested in his work.

Jack, avoiding expensive hotels, engaged a room at the Ferrier House on Jackson street, a place which appeared to be frequented by a poor class of drummers. He took every possible precaution to throw any one who might be following him off the scent. The letter he concealed in a money-belt, which he buckled about his waist, and he went to sleep with all his clothes on and a revolver under the pillow. The door was double bolted, and yet, in spite of all these precautions the detective awoke next morning to find that his room had surely been entered in some mysterious fashion—that he had just as surely been chloroformed. While, as for the clue, it was gone with the belt and a thousand dollars which he had drawn from the bank. And yet the door still remained double bolted. It was not until Jack left the room that he discovered the metal number on the outside door had been recently changed. Searching still farther, he found the number duplicated. He had been shown one room and put to sleep in another. That there was some secret means of entrance to this second room he felt sure, but he could not find it.

Madam Sally's detectives, however, had been more fortunate. Jack always believed that they had bribed the hotel clerk to help them do the trick.

At the breakfast-table Jack thought it all over and realized what a horrible blunder he had made in not copying the letter. It was too late now; he could remember much, but not all. Part of it he had not been able to read, as it was in French. It had been his intention to get it translated that morning.

While he was thus regretfully pondering, Arthur's card was laid on the table by the waiter.

"The gem'n is very anxious to see yo' at once, sah," said the man. "Tole him yo' were at breakfast. All de same, he jest 'sisted dat I gib yo' de keard."

"Show him right in," replied Jack, wondering what was going to happen now.

Arthur certainly looked deeply crestfallen as he extended his hand to Jack.

"I suppose you won't forgive me and shake hands," he said.

"Indeed I will!" cried Jack. "What brought you here?"

"Ask me rather what sent me here. My dear fellow, I have recovered my senses. Where I was mad before I am now sane. Have you talked with Mr. Fox over the phone?"

"I have."

"And his advice?"

"Came in the form of orders. I am to go right ahead on the case at his expense."

"Good! May I go with you?"

"Sure! I bear you no grudge. Where you got I might have landed myself but for a strange dream I had."

Arthur reddened. "What do you mean? What do you know?" he demanded. "I'm afraid I don't quite get you."

"Shall I speak out freely?"

"Do, please, and I promise to do the same. I have made an ass of myself the worst way."

"How did you find me out?"

"Very simple. Hired a taxi. Ordered the chauffeur to inquire at every hotel in the city for a fellow about your size. This is our fourth call."

It was hard for Jack to begin; he felt, however, that he was only postponing the evil moment. So he blurted out all that he had heard and seen on board the yacht.

"All true," answered Arthur when he had finished. "I richly deserve the medicine which was dealt out to me, and I have swallowed it. That woman could undermine the morals of a saint. As for Ralph, who, by the way, owes me thousands of dollars of borrowed money, he has played me a scurvy trick. His drunkenness was all a sham. It was a put-up job to get the clue, and I'm glad it failed. I am ashamed to confess that I entered your stateroom and hunted for it one of the nights. But the scales have fallen from my eyes. I love Zitana better than ever. Beautiful as she is, the fair Fantime don't get me again."

"Glad to hear you say so," answered Jack heartily. "Have you seen her since you landed?"

A sheepish look came over Arthur's face. "I may as well confess," he answered. "I thought I had an appointment with her. She most beautifully bilked me. In short, she must have put up at another hotel altogether. She certainly did not go to the St. Charles, as she said she was going to. I have every reason to believe that she has gone off with Ringwood. But now, Jack, since all danger is over, you may as well show me the letter."

"I would gladly do it if I had it to show," replied Jack, taking his turn at looking foolish, "but unfortunately Madam Sally was one too many for me. She won out, after all."

"It's too bad, but can't be helped. Tell me what you remember of the letter."

"It was signed 'Bassier'; dated New Orleans back in the early Seventies—the exact date I forget. It was addressed to 'Madam Duval.' There were other papers with it. All dated at about the same time. The text of the letter was in French. It was only from an English postscript that I was able to pick up my clue."

"So? And that postscript?"

"Related to the mysterious disappearance of a then famous violinist—one Simon Sebastian."

"There was such a violinist. He did disappear, and was never heard of afterward. What did the postscript say?"

"I don't pretend to be accurate, but it ran something like this: 'Sebastian takes it very hard at the Paradise. He refuses to play. It will need you to tame him. Hope we may see you soon.'"

"How came you to recognize this as an important clue?"

"Oh, Mr. Fox enlightened me. He told me that Sebastian was one of those who disappeared in that house, and that he had worked on the case. The other was Madam Cantini, an opera singer."

"That is right, and now a ballet-dancer. He believes I can see Madam Duval's hand in it all?"

"Absolutely."

Arthur lit a cigarette and sat smoking in silence. "Haven't you forgotten something?" he asked at last.

"What?"

"The motive for coming down here?"

"Didn't I mention it?"

"No."

"It was an oversight. It said in the postscript, 'I am leaving for Vermilion next Tuesday.' Fox thought it best I should act on that."

"And where is Vermilion?"

Jack produced a pocket map of the State of Louisiana and pointed out the parish in question.

"All swamp," said Arthur.

"Yes; I consulted a larger map in the library," Jack replied.

"And that's where you propose to head for?"

"That is it."

"It's the correct dope, and I am with you. Meanwhile, let's look up Roscoe."

It was at the Gulf House that Professor Roscoe was staying. On the way there in the taxi Arthur spoke much of the dream, which he seemed to regard as something very remarkable. "And that is the way you were able to describe Roscoe so accurately?" he remarked.

"That was the way," replied Jack. "I seem to have hit it, too."

"Absolutely! Couldn't have come closer, as you will see for yourself when we get to the hotel."

And Jack did see. The little lame old man who came to them he would have known had he met him on the street. The professor had but little to say. He did not seem very deeply impressed with Jack, but when Arthur explained that he was working under the direction of the great Fox, he was better satisfied. He was curious as to their destination, and anxious to know why they should be going to that most despairingly desolate country.

"I suppose you know your business, you two," he finally said. "As for myself, I am ready for anything which is likely to restore to me my dear child."

"We start first thing in the morning, professor," replied Arthur, "so it would be just as well for you to come aboard to-night."

The little man assented; the night passed. It seemed good to Jack to be aboard the beautiful yacht with the discouraging presence of Ralph Ringwood and the movie star removed.

And so they sailed away at daybreak, bound for the most horribly desolate country in the United States.

CHAPTER NINE

PROFESSOR ROSCOE'S REMARKABLE NARRATIVE

OFF Gaspe, Jack stood looking shoreward. The yacht had stopped. A dense maze of tropical green confronted his vision everywhere. It was beautiful to look at, but there was no sign of human habitation. Professor Roscoe stood leaning over the rail, apparently lost in deep thought, until suddenly, turning upon Jack, he said:

"Boy, do you know I believe you are right in coming here. It is fate—yes, it certainly is fate."

"Tell us more about it, professor!" cried Arthur, coming up then. "I am interested."

"In Zitana," replied the professor. "Yes, my memories concern her."

"Ha! Are you going to speak of her early history?"

"I ought not, I must not; and yet——"

"And yet, why not?" retorted Arthur. "Am I not as much interested as you are? Explain yourself, professor. Now is surely the time."

"Then listen," answered Roscoe. "All that you see belonged to my darling's father."

"Is it possible? Is the man alive?"

"Oh, no; he died in Paris years ago."

"What was his name?"

It was here that the ballet-master balked. "I fear to tell," he replied; "and yet, I feel impressed to do so. His name was Rene Duval."

Arthur gave a start. "Was he anything to the rich Madam Duval?" he asked.

"Only her husband."

"Do you mean to tell me that this woman of millions is Zitana's mother?"

"I believe her so to be."

"Is Zitana then heir to all this territory? Ralph Ringwood claims to be that."

"I know it. Yet I believe Zitana to be the rightful heir."

"Why have you never put her claim forward in that case?"

"Because I love her as a daughter, and don't want to lose her, as I sure should indeed have done. So I am sure my secret has been discovered by Madam Duval, though how, I cannot imagine. I have never confided it to a living soul until now."

Arthur waited, but the ballet-master remained silent.

"Just one thing, professor. Did you ever make an effort to secure for Zitana her rights?"

"Once; I was informed that Mrs. Duval had no real control over any of this property, although possessed of much elsewhere that really is her own. But I shall say no more, boys—at least, not now. We must attend to this man."

Their visitor proved to be an aged colored man, wearing very little in the way of clothes. He had a few oranges, limes and pineapples in his boat; his dialect was the broadest of the broad.

"Scuse me, gem'n!" he called up. "Tort as how mebbe yo' uns would lak a little fruit."

"And so we shall, uncle," replied Arthur. "Give you five dollars for your load."

"Fi-five! Massah, I won't deceibe a lib'ral man lak' yo'. 'Tain't wuth no sich a price 'round heah."

"Too little?"

"No, no! Too much."

"That's all right, then. Here you are." Arthur flung down two silver dollars and a handful of change into the boat, directing Yama to care for the fruit. "Is this Gaspe?" he then asked.

"It suah am, massah," was the reply, "an' a mighty po' place hit are. Dar's on'y half a dozen on us left now. Res' all gone; we'd be gone too, on'y we's old an' hev been heah all our lives."

Here Professor Roscoe butted in. "I think I recognize you, uncle," he said. "Aren't you Gabriel, of long ago?"

"Same old Gabe, massah, on'y older'n eber; but, say, I can't remember yo'."

"Remember the wreck of the *Golden Queen* fifteen or sixteen years ago?"

"Ah suah do. Say, wasn't dat a tough storm? Cost twenty libes, dat storm did. Dar warn't no one sabed 'cept Mammy Liza's gal and a lame Frenchman. A woman an' chile, bote white, was sabed fust-off, but de sea ketched 'em in de end. 'Twas an awful night."

"I'm the lame Frenchman Gabriel. I want you to tell me what became of Liza, if you can."

"Suah I can! She went up to Maison Rouge and dey let her in. Reckon she's behind de gates now, ef she hain't dead. Hain't seen her since. Great gal, Liza; but say, her mudder beat her all holler. De ole Mammy Liza could raise de dead."

"So could her daughter," murmured Roscoe in a low voice.

Arthur eyed him narrowly, but made no comment. "His information can be pumped later," thought Jack, just as much interested. "While I have the chance, it's up to me to make the most to be made out of this old nigger." He accordingly started to question Gabriel about the Maison Rouge, when he was checked by a touch on the arm from the professor. "Don't," said the ballet-master. "These people are very curious and also horrible liars. I have decided to tell all I know. I have it from a source not to be questioned—one who was born in that mysterious house and is probably living there now, if she is living at all."

Jack took the hint. "Just one more question," he said. "Uncle, has there been another yacht here within the last two days?"

"No, sah; none sense—— But I'se dumb. Yo' doan' git nuffin' out ob me."

"Oh, all right."

"No, 'tain't all, nuther," retorted the old darky sullenly. "Be youse t'inking uv gwine up to de lake?"

"We are."

"Boss, dar wuz a time when we uns wouldn't hev 'lowed hit, an' to force a passage ob de Goose Neck would hab cost yo' your libes; but we are all ole now, an' she won't send us help. We shan't try to stop yer; all de same, I advise yo' not to try it. A hull lot hab, an' few eber come back. S'pose yo' know your bizness. Dat 'ar's all Ah's got to say."

Upon this the old fellow pulled away, paying no heed to Jack's call for him to return. Professor Roscoe stood gazing after him in silence. His thoughts seemed to be far away. Arthur beckoned to Jack to join him. "Don't bother the old man," he said. "If he keeps his promise I am going to find out things which I have been trying to get at ever since I first became interested in Zitana. It is of the highest importance that we should learn all we can. I am a believer in your dream gates, Jack. They are real."

"I'm sure of it," answered Jack. "Play you a game of pinochle."

"Good! I'll call Yama to fetch beer and cigars; also lemons, sugar and water for mine. Goes without saying, since I know you are not addicted to beer."

When the steward had performed his mission, Arthur said: "Yama, send somebody to the nigger settlement and let them see if they can't pick up a couple of turtles. I want turtle soup for dinner to-day, if it is to be had. Roscoe is very partial to turtle soup, washed down with green chablis," he explained; "as a topper, a pony of Benedictine. I have all the ingredients for mellowing the old man except the turtles."

"Trust Yama to get them, if they are to be had."

His trust was not in vain. The dinner was an excellent one, and the professor evidently enjoyed it to the fullest extent. Not a word did he say until it was all over, so far as his promise was concerned; but when he had put away the Benedictine and lighted a long, black cigar, he began:

"Now, boys, I have been thinking it all over, and I have convinced myself that you are right. I am going to tell Zitana's life story, and it is a long one. You must prepare to be patient. Being an old story with me, my conclusions may have become warped with the passage of the years and your young brains needed to freshen them. Kindly refrain from interruption; if there is anything in special that you want to ask about, make a note and question me afterward. Here goes:

"Although I have long passed as a Frenchman, I am actually an American. My father, Jacques Halevy, never saw France, being born and bred in New Orleans, while my mother was Jane Ann Roscoe, a Vermont Yankee, brought South by a rich cotton dealer as governess for his children."

The professor took another pull at his cigar and continued: "It was the same with Zitana's mother; she was of Spanish stock, but born in New Orleans, as was her grandfathers and grandmothers before her. Her name was Adele Hernandez. Her mother was one of the Ravel family, and had been a famous ballet-dancer in her day—way back in the Thirties and Forties. She discovered talent in Adele, and taught her to dance, but when she attempted to come out in public she was laughed at and guyed. People called her dancing old-fashioned, and so it was. Mrs. Hernandez had a large family and little money; she had not been in society or even attended the theater in years. She was a sensible woman, and realized that all was not lost and that it was only necessary to get up to date. I was then assistant ballet-master at De Bar's Theater, and she sent for me. 'Heard of my girl?' she asked in her abrupt way. I had. Did I know of the fizzle she had made? I did. 'Then watch her dance. Tell me what the matter is, and if you can remedy it.' I watched, and had my answer ready. 'Your daughter is a genuine artiste, but has been wrongly instructed.' 'Just so. I'm her instructor. I am also a back number, it seems, and did not know it. Can you bring Adele up to date?' 'Easily. I can put the girl in such shape that any manager will be glad to hire her inside of a month.' 'Good! Go at it. Charge what is right, and you shall be promptly paid.'"

"Try a fresh cigar, professor," put in Arthur, pushing over the box.

The ballet-master lighted up in silence. It was fully five minutes before he spoke again. "Gentlemen, my efforts were perfectly successful," he then said. "We made a great deal of money, for those days. For a year Adele stuck to the stage. Then society claimed her. She became in New Orleans exactly what Zitana afterwards became in New York. Then came the Civil War, which ruined all. Adele was now past thirty. Her beauty was waning. For ten years I had

loved her, and well she knew it; but she would have none of me. Suitors had flocked to her shrine in droves. She could have married a fortune twenty times over; she would have none of them. After New Orleans fell to the Banks and Butler money was exceedingly scarce, we found it hard to live. Mrs. Hernandez died under the strain; the children went their several ways. Adele was left on my hands, and she fretted constantly. 'Halevy,' she said one day, 'let's you and I go to Paris. I'm sure we can make money there. New Orleans is stone dead.' I managed to raise the money, and we went. Adele was right. She became one of the lions of the society which sprang into existence at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. French women of skill in their line quickly restored my darling's charms. At thirty-eight Adele looked twenty-five. I loved her more deeply than ever, but I had no chance. I was only lame Halevy, her handy man. But she had come to realize that she was rapidly nearing a period when, if she ever expected to make a rich alliance, it must be done then or never. Suddenly, one of her old New Orleans admirers turned up, claiming past acquaintance. Rene Duval was his name. His father was said to be fabulously rich, owning whole squares of real estate in New Orleans, whole parishes in Southern Louisiana. On top of that he bore the reputation of being a man of mystery. I looked up his record when Rene was paying attention to Adele before the war, but could learn little, except that his New Orleans real estate holdings were certainly real. Rene did not claim to be worth a dollar personally, but that he was an only child and would come in for millions at his father's death. To cut it short—it may sound strange to you to hear me say it—they patched it up between them and were married. A month later Adele sent for her Halevy. She was in a furious rage. She had just learned that her husband not only drank to excess but that his allowance had long since been cut off, and that he proposed to live by gambling and on her earnings. 'What am I to do, Halevy?' she kept demanding. 'What am I to do?' 'Think of your future,' I replied. She took my advice, and soon Zitana came. For three years Adele endured agonies for her baby's sake, and, I must confess, developed a degree of unselfishness that I did not believe she possessed. Meanwhile her life with Duval had been just as trying as she anticipated. She rejoiced when one day the papers reported him dead—drowned in the Seine. Adele refused to identify it, but sent me. Certainly the clothes were Duval's, but the corpse was not in a condition to make certain recognition an easy matter. However, I did it, and the things was buried under the name of Rene Duval. Here, gentlemen, ends the first chapter. Talking is dry work at best. I suggest another bottle of green chablis."

CHAPTER TEN

THE REST OF THE TALE

"IF either of you boys have any questions you would like to ask, now is your time," remarked Professor Roscoe as he sipped his wine.

"I don't know that I have," replied Arthur quietly. "All that you have told interests me deeply. I am anxious to hear more."

"There is not so much more to tell," continued the professor.

"Let me ask one question," aded Jack. "Have you anything of the description of a map or chart of this region?"

The professor shook his head. "I have many times tried to get my hands on one," he answered, "but I never could learn that such a thing exists. At the time I was here before, the country for hundreds of miles around was reported to me as an absolutely impenetrable morass. Beyond Vermilion Bay lies Lake St. Francis. Out of that—or rather into it, I should say—empties a nameless river which, followed up, brings one to a pair of enormously high gates, supported by equally tall, wooden figures of men."

Arthur glanced meaningly at Jack, who continued, "And beyond the gates?"

"Lies a different country, which the colored people call 'Paradise.' It was then the property of the Duval family, who still held hundreds of slaves. There was but one house on the tract outside of the slave quarters. This was then known as La Maison Rouge. You heard old Gabriel allude to it. I cannot believe that he has ever seen it. When Madam Duval does the disappearance act it is my belief that it is to the Maison Rouge she goes. But I have finished my wine, and am now ready to go on with my story."

"After Duval's death," resumed the professor, "it was not difficult for me to persuade Adele that her child's interests demanded her return to New Orleans. She was much run down and very nervous. Her doctor suggested a sea voyage as a remedy, so instead of engaging passage on a steamer we chartered the cabin of the American cotton ship *Queen*. She was wrecked on this coast in a terrible storm, which drove her miles out of her course. Adele, Zitana and myself were the only ones saved, with the exception of an octoroon woman named Liza. For a last name she called herself Duval. She was born at La Maison Rouge, but with her mother, who had the reputation of being a witch, she escaped at an early age. Rene took her to Paris; he also bestowed her upon his wife as a maid. He always spoke of her as his property—in short, a slave. It was a terrible night; as the storm did not appear to be over, we sought shelter. I could not walk fast, so I sent Adele and Liza ahead with the child. They took refuge in a hut. A moment later a bolt of lightning had slain Zitana, to all appearance. Adele lost her head. Rushing out, she threw herself into the Gulf. Liza saw her swept away, and so reported to me when I at last arrived. She declared that the child was not dead, and was so positive that I insisted upon the reason. 'Because my spirit friends tell me so, and I believe them,' she at last declared. I sneered at the answer. It seemed too absurd. 'What you do not believe I will prove to you,' she then declared. 'Halevy, you know not what you say. If you saw a spirit, would you be afraid?' 'Indeed, no!' I cried. 'If you can show me one, do it.' 'I take you at your word,' the strange creature with whom I had never had much to do answered. 'Close your eyes; listen, but do not speak nor open them till I give the word. If you attempt to peep there will be nothing further doing. Do you understand?' 'I hear what you say, and will follow your instructions,' I answered 'but I have no belief whatever in your claim.' Instead of answering she called out in a loud voice several times: 'Lavinia, come! Lavinia, come!' At last there came an answer in a strange voice, unmistakably that of a colored woman: 'I won't, neither. Kean't de no better dan Ah done befo' 'Tain't decent fo' me to come lak dat befo' dis yere white man.' Liza answered this by a question. 'Will you try your best to send some friend of his in full form? Some one whom he will be sure to recognize?' 'Suah' was the answer, 'but it mus' be some color'd pusson. 'Twon't be no use 'tall fo' me to try no white spirit. T'anks, that's all.' Then to me she added, 'You have heard, Halevy. Can you think of such a person as Lavinia describes?' 'Oh, yes,' I answered, "but I won't give the name nor even tell you whether it's man or woman.' 'Wait till you're asked,' she replied pettishly. It was a woman, and I fixed my thoughts upon her. She had been a slave in my father's home and was dead for many years. There was silence for a few moments, and then Liza said quietly, 'You may open your eyes now, Halevy. Look towards the door.' I obeyed. Well, gentlemen, all I can say is that there stood Black Stella, my nurse, looking perfectly natural. She had been dead for twenty years. Her lips moved, she made a step in advance, her black face beaming with affection. Then she vanished, and I was looking at empty space."

"Do you expect us to believe that?" demanded Arthur. "That's what spiritualists call materialization. It's all humbug, and I know it."

The professor shrugged his shoulders. "I can only relate what I saw," he coldly replied. "My story is done. Zitana did come to life, but she was blind. I've had her ever since."

"And Liza?" demanded Jack.

"She went her way and I went mine," was the reply. "She claimed that she was going to the Maison Rouge for help. I waited ten days, but she did not return. At the end of that time I was able to signal a coaster. I was taken off with the child, and carried it to New Orleans."

He sat silent. Jack broke in, "But Madam Duval? Do you believe that she is Adele, who was also saved?"

"I am sure of it."

"Did she refuse to admit her identity?"

"Absolutely; or to recognize me in any way."

"What were the circumstances?"

"Why, I remained some three or four years in New Orleans. Later I took charge of one of Jarrett & Palmer's big *Corps de Ballet*, for I was still master of my profession. This took one all over; finally I settled down in New York. It was about that time that Madam Duval began to be talked of as a very rich woman. The talk did not interest me. Duval is a common name down South. I had then no other idea than that Adele was actually dead, until one day this woman of millions was pointed out to me. Instantly I recognized her as Adele."

"Did you make no attempt to let her know the fact?" Jack inquired.

"Not then," replied the professor, "but I did later. She rejected me with scorn; swore she never knew any one named Halevy; that she had never been in New Orleans. After that, what was I to do?"

"Nothing," replied Arthur. "Did you speak of the child?"

"Tried to, but she turned her back on me, bluffed me by saying, 'You can't blackmail me, my man. You only waste your time.'"

The entrance of Yama brought the conversation to an end.

"Captain, him want see you, sir," he said.

"Show him in," answered Arthur, and presently the captain came.

"Mr. Clayton, I think that if we want to avoid trouble we'd better get on the move," he said rather earnestly.

"Why?" demanded Arthur.

"For two reasons. In the first place, there is a handsome yacht making in towards the bay."

"Reason enough!" cried Arthur. "And the other?"

"Why, sir, when the boys went to the nigger settlement after the turtles they were very closely questioned. To be sure, they saw but few people, and those mostly old, but they were told that in the old days the yacht would never have been allowed to go through to the lake."

"Well, the man who pulled out to us told us that much."

"Three or four boats have come out since and are hovering around. They've got shotguns——"

"I don't fear the ignorant fellows, but I don't want Ringwood to catch on to our curves. Go ahead, cap. When you get into Vermilion Lake hide, if you can. How far will your chart carry you?"

"Just to the lake, sir."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Don't you think I was right?" inquired Arthur, after Captain Kellerman had departed.

"Dead right," replied Jack.

"It's the logical thing to do," added Professor Roscoe. "I only hope we get through this Goose Neck all right."

They went on deck, saw the other yacht in the distance, watching her fading outlines as they steamed up the bay.

It was the same wild scene everywhere. The boats followed them for a short distance, then turned back. The Goose Neck proved a narrow, tortuous passage all but overgrown with cypress, from which vast tangles of Spanish moss descended. It was fairly alive with alligators, which did not seem to mind the yacht much, but were too lazy to get out of the way. No serious trouble was encountered during the passing of this channel. Emerging from it, a charming sheet of water lay spread out before them. "Vermilion Lake," explained Captain Kellerman. "My chart puts it at eighty miles across from this point, while the width——"

"Get into hiding as quick as ever you can, cap," interrupted Arthur. "Can't you cut off the smoke now and use the electric motor?"

"I sure can, Mr. Clayton."

They ran on, keeping close inshore, discovering at last a little land-locked bay so completely hidden by cypress and Spanish moss that Arthur, declaring they could do no better, ordered the captain to run in.

"Now then, Jack," he said, "you and I will board the launch and see what we can do about catching on to Ringwood's curves."

It was after six when the launch returned. Arthur and Jack had made the trip alone, merely remarking to Captain Kellerman that they were to remain where they were through the night. Arthur at once joined the professor, while Jack, who looked as if he had been doing most of the hard work, retired to his stateroom to change his clothing.

"It was Ringwood, all right, I suppose?" the professor asked.

"Oh, yes," answered Arthur. "Clue or no clue, he don't seem to know how to get out of this lake any better than we do. But what's the matter, professor? You are looking pale and troubled."

"Am I?" was the reply. "Probably I worry too much."

It was the same at dinner. The professor had very little to say; after the wine and cigars were on the table he suddenly broke out:

"Perhaps," replied Arthur. "Out with it."

"Make no move to-morrow. Run out into plain sight and just lie there."

Arthur hesitated. "Odd," he said after a moment, "but you have voiced Jack's idea. What put such a notion into your head?"

"I prefer not to say. Will you do it?"

"Well, yes, since you both wish it."

"As for me," added the professor, "I'll explain my reasons day after to-morrow. I know it must seem odd to you, Arthur, but I really have a reason."

So the dawn of the following day found *La Zitana* in plain sight, with the other yacht lying in the offing at a distance of about a mile. Such was the situation when the professor appeared on deck to find Arthur pacing it alone.

"I had a very restless night," he remarked anxiously. "I hope I'm not going to get sick on your hands, Arthur. You set too good a table for the old man, I'm afraid. But tell me, what's the name of that yacht?"

"The *Guiding Star*."

"You made some remark about Ringwood failing to find the passage out of the lake?"

"Yes; he skirted all around the shore, evidently seeking an outlet, but he didn't find anything."

"He'll probably be trying it again to-day."

"Probably. I shan't attempt to follow him, but shall stay right here."

The morning passed quietly enough. Through a glass they saw Ringwood go away in a launch. Later, just as they were rising from the lunch-table, Yama announced that Ringwood was alongside and wanted to speak to Arthur.

"Come, Jack," said Arthur, "and you, too, professor. I won't talk to the treacherous snake without witnesses. Is the lady with him, Yama?"

Indeed she was, and if ever a woman had bestowed pains on her toilette it was Madam Sally.

"Why, hello, Arthur!" she called out. "You're not mad, I hope? Seeing that you had bounced your crack detective, I didn't see any harm in getting the clue away from him, if I could, and I succeeded. Beyond bringing us together here it hasn't done much good, however. That letter is very old. Everything has become so overgrown here that we can't seem to locate the stream leading up to Maison Rouge. Perhaps you've had better luck."

"I'm not entering into any discussion with you, madam," replied Arthur coolly. "Ralph, you have played me a scurvy trick. I have crossed you off my list of friends. I couldn't help you if I would, and wouldn't if I could. We have made no attempt to discover the passage."

"But you are going to, of course?"

"Are we? That's our business."

"Be nice, Arthur. I came here to propose——"

"Save yourself the time. I decline to have any dealings with you. Good-day."

He turned away, Jack and the professor following his example.

"We'll keep 'em guessing," he remarked. "From this on I propose to go ahead without the slightest reference to Ringwood, *et al.*"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AT THE GIANT GATES

BUT Madam Sally was not so easily downed. She blew a kiss at Arthur and made a face as the launch moved away.

"They certainly have one big nerve," muttered Jack.

"I believe all Ringwood said," replied Arthur. "Forty years brings big changes to a swamp like this. Honestly, I have but little hope of finding it."

"We shall find it."

Evening came; supper was called. Once more the wine and cigars were set on the table, after everything had been removed.

"Arthur," said the professor, "would you mind if I turned out all the lights but one? I am feeling very strangely to-night."

"Certainly not," replied Arthur. "How do you feel, Jack? You have been singularly silent all day."

"Spookish!" replied the detective laughingly. "Ever since I got up this morning I seem to have had a feeling as if there was somebody aboard who didn't belong here."

The professor turned out a glass of port and swallowed it at one gulp.

"Same feeling I've had on me since yesterday," he said.

"You must be mediumistic, Jack," laughed Arthur. "I remember a medium I once visited in Paris—quite a famous character, by the way—who gave me a good calling down for speaking of 'spooks.' 'If by spooks you mean spirits, young man,' she said, 'you will do well to remember that we are all spooks. Some spooks have one sort of body and some another. We can only see the spooks who belong to our own class.' 'Oh, thanks,' I replied. 'Glad to be instructed in the truths of spiritualism.' She looked at me fixedly. 'Let me tell you something,' she replied. 'You really are going to be so instructed.'"

"Who was that?" asked the professor drowsily.

"The famous Madam Memphis."

"So? Let's see, she prophesied the present war, I believe?"

"Yes; five years before it came—and with all its horrors."

"Strange! Bless me, how sleepy I am! I think I'll drink another glass of that excellent port of yours, Arthur. It may brighten me up."

"Help yourself," replied Arthur, pushing over the bottle.

The professor turned down the wine; the effect was immediate. Far from arousing him, he spread his hands out before him upon the table, his head sank lower and lower, until it rested upon them. Instantly he fell into a deep sleep.

"Bless my soul, what's the matter with us all?" muttered Arthur. "I feel too dopy for anything. Don't be surprised, Jack, if I fall asleep myself." And this is precisely what he did within five minutes.

Jack sat there puzzled. Arthur, as well as the professor, had sampled the wine; he, Jack, had drank none of it. He did not feel sleepy; nevertheless, he did feel very peculiar. He had never experienced any such sensation as when suddenly he heard a woman's voice say:

"Young man, oblige me by putting out that other light."

Who had spoken?

Again came the request; this time it was differently put.

"Pryor," said the voice, "you are missing your chance. We want you to succeed. You must succeed! Help us to help you."

"We—you——" gasped Jack.

"Yes, yes; spirits, spooks, ghosts—any old thing you like to call us, only don't delay me. Put out that other light."

Jack arose and turned off the electric burner.

"Watch! Listen!" continued the voice. "Remember what you see and hear."

The first Jack saw was a strange, colorless light, which shed no radiance, gather about the head of the sleeping professor. This slowly extended downward until it seemed to emanate from his entire form. Then all in an instant a woman stood beside the slumberer.

She was a plain person, well advanced in years and plainly dressed.

"Listen," she said, turning a keen, gray eye on Jack, "you and these others want to get to La Maison Rouge, to which house no stranger has penetrated in many years. Tell my friend Halevy that I called on him to say that I think the accepted time has come and that you are going to succeed. Say to him to read his Bible. Add that he is not to bother about those who are watching and spying. Do you hear me? Have you got all I have said?"

"Y-yes, ma'am! I think so!" muttered Jack.

"It is well," said the woman. "Farewell. Turn the lights on full head, please."

Jack obeyed. She was gone! He looked for the woman in vain. The professor was sitting up and rubbing his eyes. Arthur's head rolled restlessly. Evidently he was about to awake.

"Will they believe me when I tell them?" thought Jack. "Arthur won't, I'm certain. As for the professor——"

He was interrupted by the professor himself, who said: "Arthur seems to have fallen asleep. I came pretty near dropping off myself. Why do you gaze at me so strangely, boy. Has anything occurred?"

"Yes," replied Jack, and he went on to tell.

The professor looked puzzled. "It is very strange," he muttered, "but when I awoke I was dreaming of Madam Duval. The woman you describe is she."

Arthur awoke. He listened without comment; after brief reflection, he said: "Look here. You drank two glasses of that port, professor, while I put away only one. It could not have been the wine which put me to sleep. I suggest we go on deck and see if there is anything in this fire-ball talk."

They repaired to the deck accordingly. In the distance the tinkle of a guitar could be heard.

"Madam Sally appears to be favoring Ringwood," remarked Jack.

"Pardon me!" broke in the professor. "There it is! Don't you see?"

In the distance, to the northwest, was an oval ball of dull, colorless light. It hung motionless, very close to the horizon.

"Going to follow it?" demanded the professor. "I, for one, am for seeing this thing through."

"I certainly am, if it proves to be movable," replied Arthur. "There comes the moon. Let's see if it is going to have any effect on the light."

It had not the least. Arthur produced a whistle and gave Captain Kellerman's call.

"Cap," he said when that officer appeared, "how soon can you make a start?"

"Why, right away, if you say the word, Mr. Clayton," was the reply, "but——"

"There are no butts. Start!"

"Yes, sir. Which way am I to go?"

"See that light over there?"

"Certainly."

"Then follow it."

"But it don't appear to be moving."

"Go to it. If it moves, follow."

"Very good, sir," replied the captain, and off he went.

The *La Zitana* was quickly got on the move, and the mysterious fire-ball responded. The yacht made good time, but, so far as the boys could see, the distance between its bow and the light was not reduced by so much as the fraction of an inch. The night advanced. They had covered many miles. The moonlight showed them that they had penetrated the swamp and were following an extremely narrow waterway. Suddenly the fire-ball vanished.

"Gone!" cried Jack. "Time for us to call a halt."

Arthur consulted his watch. "Two-forty-five," he announced. "I say so, too." He gave the order accordingly, and all hands turned in, feeling that they had witnessed a display of occult forces quite beyond their comprehension.

Morning dawned clear and hot. What Jack sought was the deck; he could not discover a cloud in the sky. After breakfast, when all three put in an appearance, a light cloud about the shape and bigness of the fire-ball occupied the place where that phenomenon had been last seen.

"Evidently we are in the much-sought river," declared Arthur, "and there's your cloud. Follow this channel as far as it will take us, cap. Mind your soundings. We don't want to get aground."

After the captain had started the yacht he came back again. "Do you notice that singular cloud?" he questioned. "There isn't another like it in the sky."

Arthur assured him that they had all noticed it, but could not account for it.

"It reminds me of that strange light we kept seeing ahead of us last night," continued Captain Kellerman. "This is an odd country, to say the least."

"Sail ahead," urged Arthur. "We can't be far from our journey's end."

"Which is?" questioned the captain slyly.

But the look Arthur shot at the man shut him up. "You forget that it was part of our contract that no questions were to be asked on that score," he quietly said.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," was the confused reply. Exit Kellerman.

On went *La Zitana*, turning many a curve in that torturous stream. Suddenly sweeping around one where the foliage was even more dense than usual, all exclaimed, for they recognized the fact that they had attained their goal. Directly ahead of them towered two huge wooden gates a hundred feet high, seemingly supported by two gigantic images of men. Down from the top of these gates the Spanish moss hung in vast clusters. On either side lay an impenetrable morass, from which the evening croak and whistle of frogs and splash of alligators could be heard.

"The gates!" cried Jack.

"Even so," echoed Arthur. "Beyond lies our mystery, Brother Detective, and it remains for us to solve it."

"Ah!" added the aged ballet-master. "The mystery of La Maison Rouge!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

A SHORT AEROPLANE RIDE

THE yacht was brought to a standstill, and Captain Kellerman came forward. "We seem to be blockaded, Mr. Clayton," he said. "I don't see how we are going to get beyond those gates—at least not to-night."

"We can't get beyond them, nor do we want to to-night," replied Arthur. "This is our objective point. By the way, where is your cloud, captain?"

Where, sure enough? The cloud had vanished as soon as the gates hove in sight. Jack saw it go.

"Tie up for the night," ordered Arthur. "Don't let the other yacht get too near us. There is little doubt that they have trailed us and will soon be along. Gentlemen, it grows damp here, and the captain's fears of malaria may be realized. Let's be getting below."

But this was only to get rid of the captain; they lingered for half an hour, studying the gates. The gigantic human figures were manifestly cypress-trees of huge proportions. At some time in the distant past the limbs had been lopped off, so as to make those remaining resemble legs and arms. Far up in the air huge circles of boards had been fastened, in which human faces had been cut. With the passage of time the trees had grown beyond these. The Spanish moss did not at any point extend near the level of the stream. There was no sign of any postern nor of any way of opening the gates in part. Nor was there anything like a bell or a horn to signal with. Dark, time-worn and mysterious, there stood the gates, looking as if they had not been disturbed in a hundred years. Yet Jack saw things about them which the others did not seem to see. The detective was fast learning to observe.

It was growing very dark, and the dampness was great. "We better go below and take a dose of quinine and a glass of brandy," declared Arthur. "If one of us was to be taken sick here, to say the least, it would be extremely inconvenient."

They did so, and shortly afterward supper was announced. They were still at table when Yama brought in Ringwood's card, on which was scrawled:

"DEAR CLAYTON—We are all in the same boat, so to speak. Let's make up. To-morrow will show you that you need us more than we need you. Will you spend the evening with Sal and yours truly, or shall we come to you? We have no choice. I admit my play was rather rank, but in a fight like this one has to make use of such weapons as are at hand.

"Your old friend, RALPH."

"How did this come?" Arthur asked the steward.

"Brought by a sailor in a launch," was the reply.

"The yacht lies right behind us?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send this back. There is no answer. Tell Captain Kellerman to keep an extra sharp lookout, and under no circumstances to allow any one to come aboard."

"What do you suppose he means by saying that we need him more than he needs us?" queried the professor.

"Oh, that's just bluff. Don't you agree with me, Jack?" was Arthur's reply.

"No, I don't," answered Jack bluntly.

"What then?"

"I believe he has provided himself with what was most foolishly overlooked—an aeroplane."

"By Jove!" cried Arthur. "Never thought of that. Boy, I believe you're right!"

"It's an easy solution of the problem, and the only logical one," continued Jack. "Ever use one, Arthur?"

"I've been up three or four times, but I never undertook to navigate one personally. Have you?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"And I'm out, of course," added the professor. "How about Ringwood, Clayton?"

"He is an expert," replied Arthur. "Oh, that's so, of course. I almost wish I'd accepted his overtures now."

"Is he a brave man or a coward?" demanded Jack.

"The biggest coward who ever came down the pike," replied Arthur.

"Good! Then to-morrow is enough. He is afraid to pass the gates alone. As for me, I shan't hesitate to cop his aeroplane if I get the chance."

They sat around the cabin till after eleven, wondering if the strange happenings of the previous night would be repeated, but nothing occurred.

That night Jack dreamed of the ballet-girl, but too indefinitely to be of any service.

Directly after breakfast Ralph and Madam Sally were reported alongside.

"We must go to them," declared Jack. "They should be received on board, and their aeroplane with them if possible. If they have to go back after it, have Capt. K. so place the *La Zitana* as to perfectly block the way to the gates."

They found Ringwood as chipper as ever. Madam Sally was all smiles but did not have much to say. There was no aeroplane in the launch.

"Say, Arthur, why should we make infernal fools of ourselves?" demanded Ralph. "We both set out to get to this infernal place and we have both succeeded, though how you managed to cut in ahead of us I fail to understand. We had the clue—you can't make me believe our young friend here can read French, or had it translated. We couldn't find the passage—you did. Enough! Next thing is to pass those gates."

"Exactly," replied Arthur. "It ought to be easy with your aeroplane."

"Who told you I had one?"

"Never mind. You have one, of course?"

"I admit it."

"Then why don't you go ahead and cut us out?"

"Oh, say, I'm not risking it alone, nor do I care to leave Sal alone in this queer place. What's the matter with the three of us going? The professor can stay behind and look after Sal."

From every possible angle had the matter been discussed, and this was one of them. In fact Arthur was fully prepared for this proposition, to which he gave immediate assent.

"Good! Then we are friends again!" cried Ralph. "Yes, until you try to play some new trick on me," was the reply.

"I'll send for the plane," said Ralph. To this Arthur made no reply, but as soon as the launch was gone, Capt. Kellerman swung the launch directly across the stream. If Ringwood understood the maneuver he showed it by no sign.

The aeroplane came and was brought aboard. Ralph explained its workings. It was unnecessary for the others to explain their ignorance. It was apparent. Madam Sally appeared to be the only unsatisfied one.

"You better take me along, Ralph," she said. "I assure you I'm not afraid."

"Next trip," replied Ralph. "This time it's only an exploring tour to find out how the land lies."

So the aeroplane was brought aboard and put into commission on the deck of the yacht. Jack and Arthur took their places. Ralph was about to follow them when Madam Sally put up another appeal. Ringwood turned to quiet her. Instantly the professor whipped out a knife and cut the cord securing the machine, which went soaring towards the gates.

Ralph's oath needs no record. The cut cord told the tale.

"Who's work is this?" he roared.

"Mine," replied the professor, displaying the knife. "Make the most of it. When one has to deal with a dirty dog anything is excusable. Better not come too near me."

"By Jove, the professor did nobly!" cried Arthur. "It worked out exactly as we hoped."

"Keep your eye peeled. You've got the book, remember. I'm no good at all," answered Jack.

The book referred to had been dug up in the cabin library, and both had been studying it.

Arthur said no more, but gave full attention to his work. They passed above the gates in safety and those who saw them do it and the 'plane disappear were quickly treated to another sight, which to the Ringwood contingent at least was not so pleasant. Suddenly the 'plane rose into view again. It was unoccupied, and soared away inland until it was lost to view among the tree tops. Swearing was the order of the day on the deck of the *La Zitana*.

When Arthur and Jack attempted to make their landing they had been clumsy about it, and had lost control of their machine.

"Well!" gasped Arthur. "That's a great start. I suppose it's all my fault."

"It matters little," replied Jack coolly. "Our aim was to pass the gates. We have done it. After all it may be best that the professor should remain with the yacht."

Instead of directly replying, Arthur laughed loud and long.

There was absolutely no difference in their situation, save for the path. It was scarcely three feet wide. The swamp and its alligators lay unbroken on the left, the sluggish waterway still flowed toward the gates on the right, and beyond that was the swamp again.

"How far do you think we have come?" asked Jack at last.

"Oh, I should say fully fifteen miles," replied Arthur. "What's your idea?"

"I don't believe we've covered ten."

"Surely you must be mistaken. I only wish we had a pedometer."

"Look ahead. It seems to be lighting up among the trees. The stream is also clearer. We are coming out somewhere at last."

He was right. After walking less than a quarter of a mile they suddenly stopped. Beyond lay a clearing embracing many wonderful things. But what attracted their attention principally was a long, low plantation house built of frame in the old Southern style. Its height was two stories and its color a faded red.

"Look, Arthur!" cried Jack, pointing. "Surely that must be La Maison Rouge!"

It was a very ugly, black head—the head of a negress.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MASTER OF MAISON ROUGE

FOR many minutes Arthur Clayton and Jack Pryor stood contemplating the scene before them, which, in its way, was altogether remarkable, following as it did after many miles of dismal swamp which was filled with water.

Here the land rose gradually to a height of about twenty-five feet above the swamp level. It spread away right and left, gradually assuming wider proportions than the eye could compass. Its appearance was perfectly park-like looking straight ahead, but in the distance, right and left, broad, cultivated fields were to be seen with domestic animals grazing, and people, black and white, moving about. The path now widened out to a road, which led directly up to the red plantation house, which stood in the midst of a perfect bower of trees of vast dimensions and tropical plants. Near it was another house built on the same style, but smaller. There were outbuildings beyond and pretty bungalows scattered everywhere. Children played on lawns and beneath the trees. There was everything to indicate a heavy expenditure of money and vast wealth to draw from. No adults were to be seen except a few colored women wearing gay turbans. It was a typical Southern picture, rare now, but common enough in old slavery days.

Jack was the first to break silence. "We seem to have got there all right," he remarked.

"That's what we do," replied Arthur, "and our arrival does not appear to have created the faintest excitement. I wonder what we ought to do next?"

"Go up to the red house, ring the bell, and ask for Madam Duval," chuckled Jack.

"You make a joke of it," retorted Arthur. "Faith, it seems to me the only way."

They walked on. Passing a pretty bungalow, two well-dressed ladies emerged from the door. They stared hard at the strangers and seemed surprised, but did not speak.

"Shall I question them?" whispered Jack.

"I am impressed against it," replied Arthur. "Let's push on. Our course will surely be shown us."

They passed many groups of children, who paid little heed to them. Presently they saw approaching an aged colored man supporting himself by a cane, who stared very hard. He was bareheaded and touched his white forelock respectfully. He would have passed on, however, had not Arthur checked him, saying, "Uncle, does Madam Duval live in that red house?"

"In t'other, massa. Dat is, sometimes. De madam she not allus hyar."

"She is here now?"

"Yes, massa."

"Thank you. We have business with her and will push on."

The old darky's face assumed a puzzled air. "Scuse me, sah," he faltered, "but you two don't belong in Paradise. I dunno how you eber got here, but I suah orter tell you dat it means def to strangers unless you are here by permission."

"Thank you for the warning. Is madam then that arbitrary?"

"She! She don't have nuthin' to do wid it. Massa Nall—him eberyt'ing in Paradise."

"Paradise is what you call this place?"

"Yes, massa."

"Who does it belong to?"

"Uster belong to old Massa Duval, but him mus' be dead dese many years. Kean't expect ole nigger to know 'bout dem t'ings. Some say to Madam Duval, some to Massa Nall. I dunno."

"What is Massa Nall's other name, uncle?"

"Hi, chile. Doan' ax me. I only know him as Massa Nall, same as I knowed his father befo' him. I'se ninety-eight. I'se knowed 'em all. Go yo' ways, gem'n. Only be keerful—dat's all."

The old man tottered on.

"Enter a new character on the scene," muttered Arthur. "Instead of being called upon to deal with a woman, it seems we have to go up against a man."

"Just so," replied Jack. "And if I am not greatly mistaken here he comes now."

A middle-aged man wearing a white suit and a Panama hat was just leaving the red house. As they drew nearer together Arthur stared. Nearer still and he gave a violent start. "Why, bless my soul, Jack Pryor," he cried, "I know that man! It's Nall St. Cyr."

The polished stranger came sauntering up before Jack had time to ask for details.

"Clayton, how are you?" he exclaimed. "Welcome to the Mad Paradise, as I like to call this place. Glad to see you, boy. Introduce me to your friend."

That it was a wholly unnecessary proceeding Jack instinctively felt. "He knows perfectly well I'm a detective. Heavens, what eyes the man has! Like corkscrews, ready to bore through and through."

There were no questions asked. Not the slightest curiosity was displayed. Mr. St. Cyr seemed to take their visit as a matter of course. He produced cigars and started to show them about the grounds, talking all the while of society events at which he and Arthur had met, paying little or no attention to Jack. Without direct insult, he made the young detective feel that he was regarded altogether as an inferior. After showing much and talking much he had actually explained very little. At last, consulting his watch, he announced that it was one o'clock. "You'll join me at lunch, of course," he added. "I seldom go to the trouble to dress for dinner, so we'll go right in."

"Madam Duval——" suggested Arthur.

"Oh, she lives in the other house," replied St. Cyr. "We see very little of each other. By the way, Clayton, weren't you interested in that blind dancing-girl madam brought down with her last trip?"

"If you refer to Zitana I certainly was and still am," answered Arthur eagerly. "Is she here?"

"I believe so. If I hadn't seen her dance with my own eyes I should put her down as a pretty humbug. She hasn't been able to do any dancing here. Perfect failure."

"Perhaps she resents being kidnaped," retorted Arthur.

"Possibly," replied St. Cyr, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Still Paradise is a pleasant place. I'm sure she never lived in a better. So for sentiment, it don't exist with people of her class in my way of thinking. But pardon me, my dear fellow. I was forgetting your sentiment. When you have seen as much of women as I have you'll view life through very different spectacles. Here, Cassimine, show these gentlemen to the blue room and let them be shown every attention. We are ready for lunch—let it be served in ten minutes."

This sent Arthur and Jack away with a young colored man to an elegantly furnished chamber, the appointments of which certainly left nothing to be desired.

"Had you any idea of meeting this man?" Jack inquired.

"Not the faintest," was the reply. "I know next to nothing of him, except that he has the reputation of being very wealthy. I met him a few times in New York and once in Paris. He evidently seems to be recognized as master here."

The lunch was exquisite. Arthur ate with a relish. Even Jack, unaccustomed to such food, found an abundance to supply his wants.

Not the slightest curiosity was shown as to their presence, nor any allusion made to the matter until the wine and cigars were brought in.

"About those you left behind you down at the gates, Clayton," St. Cyr then said. "All friends of yours?"

"Not at all," replied Arthur. "There is a Professor Roscoe on my yacht——"

"I remember. Aged party who had Zitana in charge."

"The same. He was with us on this search. I hope there'll be no trouble——"

"In rescuing the girl," broke in St. Cyr. "I'm sure I couldn't tell you. Have to see Madam Duval. But there is another yacht, other people."

"You remember Ralph Ringwood, St. Cyr?"

"Yes. With him is a professional woman they call Madam Sally——"

"Fantime, the Movie Star?"

"The same. We have nothing to do with them—."

St. Cyr laughed. "Let me tell you something, Clayton," he said. "I know all about the coming of both of you. You never would have got beyond Vermilion Bay if I had chosen to prevent it. Ringwood's a rascal. He has long tried to trail his aunt, and at last he has succeeded. Much good may it do him. He has no knowledge whatsoever of the real situation here, or he might have saved the expense. But that's neither here nor there. I have decided to admit these people. They are now on their way up the river. I could just as readily have stopped all hands of you or had you killed. The colored people with whom I am surrounded regard me as absolute master and themselves as slaves, obliged to do my will."

"And the fourteenth amendment——" began Arthur.

"Don't go here," laughed St. Cyr. "Listen. The Duval estate embraces five thousand square miles in Vermilion Parish alone. What we call the Paradise covers about fifteen hundred square miles. It is entirely surrounded by swamps miles and miles in extent. There are but two ways of reaching it. One, the way you came, is now never used, while the other is known only to myself and Madam Duval and the colored persons we employ, who would die sooner than reveal the secret."

"Then these colored people are practically slaves?"

"Not very arduous slavery. They know nothing of the outside world—no other life."

"And the whites?"

"That's another matter and one which I don't care to discuss. Now, Clayton, that room is at the service of yourself and friend so long as you choose to remain my guests. Your friend the professor will also be provided for. As for Ringwood and Madam Sally, they concern me alone. I think I am as well calculated to resist the charms of the latter as you have proved yourself. You have heard me called a 'woman hater,' no doubt."

Arthur reddened. "What did this man know? How could he know anything?" he asked himself, thinking of the occurrences on the yacht.

St. Cyr arose.

"If you are interested in the blind ballet-girl there is no reason why you shouldn't go over and see her," he remarked. "You are as safe here in the Paradise as you would be under your own roof," he added. "Only thing to remember is that you forced your way in here without consulting me. Don't try to leave it in the same fashion if you ever want to see New York again."

He sauntered out of the dining-room, whistled, and with a big setter dog which answered strolled away towards the outbuildings.

"What an amazing turn of affairs," muttered Arthur. "I could never in my wildest imagination have dreamed of finding that man master here."

"But what does Madam Duval count for?" questioned Jack. "Nothing, it would seem."

"That's about the size of it," answered Arthur. "But come, old man. If Zitana is across the way that's where I'm going, and before I go I want to make a bet with you."

"Well?"

"My diamond cuff buttons against your plated ones that if Madam Sally thinks the game worth while she'll get St. Cyr in spite of his confidence."

"Wouldn't wonder," replied Jack. "She nearly got me."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE SEERESS

THERE was little difference between the Maison Rouge and the second plantation house, which was painted white, where any trace of paint remained.

On its broad veranda sat an elderly woman who arose abruptly and passed inside as the two young men drew near.

"Liza! Liza!" they heard her call. "Come, Liza, they are here."

"We seem to be expected," muttered Jack.

"All along the line," replied Arthur. "We are learning every minute, but I wish the professor was here."

A woman in middle life now came out. Her face bore many traces of former beauty, which her gray hair and plain black dress helped to set off to advantage. No one but an experienced Southerner would have recognized in the slight duskiness of the fingernails and the same upon the whites of her large, clear eyes unmistakable traces of an octoroon.

"Arthur Clayton, I welcome you to our Paradise," she said. "Jack Pryor, the welcome includes you. There is one dear soul with us who will be well pleased."

"What's one going to say to such kidnapers as these?" Clayton asked himself, and he was by no means surprised that the woman should recognize him. At a glance he had recognized her.

Jack's presence embarrassed him, and much as he hated to do it, he turned to his companion and said: "Excuse me, Jack. I should like to talk with this lady alone."

Jack nodded good-naturedly and walked to the other end of the veranda.

"I see you recognize me, Mr. Clayton," the woman quietly said.

"I remember you perfectly. I was present at the seance you gave in Paris. It was the night you predicted the present war, Madam Memphis."

"Even so. You were one of the doubters who put himself most in evidence. What do you think now?"

"It is wonderful. Every word you said has come to pass. It must be a matter of record."

"It is. Yet many still doubt."

"May I ask a question?"

"Twenty—a hundred. May I state the question you were about to ask?"

"If you can."

"It is whether I am the Liza of the story Halevy told you."

"That is it."

"I am no one else. Madam Duval is Adele, and Zitana is the blind baby. Do not be angry at our kidnaping operations, Mr. Clayton, for it was the only way the mother could get her child."

Arthur sat in silence. "What am I to call you while we remain in contact with each other?" he asked at length.

"I am supposed to be Madam Duval's colored maid," she promptly replied. "Call me 'Liza'."

"Colored!" gasped Arthur. "You!"

"Oh, yes. I am an octoroon. My mother was a mulatto. My father was a white man. Hernandez was his name."

"You were asleep on the boat?"

"Yes. And the professor too. I had him asleep earlier in the day to impress him to tell you to show yourselves boldly," said Liza.

"Madam Duval——"

"Oh, she was not really there in the cabin. Only a projection."

"But the light! That wonderful cloud!"

"Mr. Clayton, if you only could know how easy all that is to a person like myself. When you sat with me in Paris you put me down as a charlatan and one who employed confederates. Before we part this time you will have to admit the contrary. Still, you are no medium. To you the inner workings of the occult can never be shown."

"Cannot the power be cultivated?"

"Under certain conditions, yes. But these do not and cannot obtain in your case. With your friend it is altogether different. I could make a most successful medium of him in a month's time."

Arthur did not reply. He was thinking of Zitana. It would seem as though this conversation might be prolonged indefinitely. Liza seemed to read his thoughts.

"Madam Duval went to prepare Zitana for your coming," she quietly said. "You need no witness to your reunion. Ha! Madam calls! Shall I bring him, missy?"

"Yes. Come along, Mr. Clayton. I rejoice for the sake of both of you. Remember, you are now playing your part in the last scenes of a drama which has held the stage here at the Paradise for a hundred years."

She led the way to the house. Jack was deeply impressed with her beauty and lady-like bearing. When it was to come his turn to learn that colored blood flowed in her veins he was even more astounded than Arthur had been.

She came to him a few minutes later.

"Jack Pryor," she said, "my standing in this community is that of Madam Duval's maid. You are to treat me accordingly; to address me as 'Liza,' and to speak of me as an inferior. Nevertheless it is we who are to play the leads in our side of a most important drama which involves the safety of Arthur Clayton and the woman he will make his bride if we succeed in escaping from this place with our lives; nor do I forget my old friend Halevy. Let us swear allegiance. What do you say?"

"I'll swear to anything that will lead to Arthur's benefit," replied Jack.

"Good!" said the woman. "Let all develop as fate decrees."

"You have predicted so much that actually came true, as I understand it," said Jack, "that it is hard to believe that you do not already know the end of our presence here."

She looked down upon him, half pityingly.

"Which remark only goes to show how much you have to learn of the occult," she quietly replied. "I know as little of it as you do. But come!" she cried. "You are mediumistic and capable of learning what Arthur Clayton may never know. Did Madam Duval look real to you when you saw her in the cabin?"

"Did she! Indeed she did. It was wonderful."

"On the contrary it was a simple thought projection. Thought is real substance, Jack—you see, I'm going to be familiar. Few possess the power of so congealing it that it can be seen by the bodily eyes. I possess the secret. Given correct conditions—in this instance you helped to make them—and nothing could be easier——"

"But the fire-ball! The cloud!" broke in Jack.

"Simple projections also. You shall be shown phenomena far more wonderful. But enough of spiritualism for the present. What say you if we take a peep at the reunited lovers? Of course I am proposing no listening nor spying but there can come no harm from just a peep."

"I am at your service," replied Jack, deeply impressed with the woman. He followed her among a mass of flowering

shrubs—a veritable tropical tangle—to a projecting window reaching to the ground.

"Take your peep," whispered Liza. Jack shot a quick glance into the elegantly furnished room. What he saw was Arthur holding a girl of wonderful beauty in his arms. But this was not what impressed him as he passed on.

He had seen a similar sight through the open door of Madam Sally's stateroom—similar, but not the same.

"They are happy," remarked Liza when Jack joined her. "I can only see happiness in store for them. But it is a long way off, and only to be reached through many troubles. I see——"

"Pardon me," broke in Jack. "You keep using the word 'see.' I am utterly ignorant when it comes to the occult, but I really want to understand you. Am I at liberty to ask as many questions as I wish?"

"You most decidedly are."

"What do you actually see that I don't see?"

"Pictures—as if in the screen portraying the future."

"Do they ever lie to you?"

"Never to me now. To some they are false."

"Explain?"

"No. Later. Time presses. You have been sent here by spirits as my assistant, young man. Your occult education must be as rapid as possible. Details will be given as we go along."

"I am submitting blindly to all you say because I want to learn. Do you claim that these pictures are produced by spirits who can read the future?"

"By spirits, absolutely. They can foresee the future a little better than spirits on earth. Aided by still higher spirits——"

"Excuse me, but I must cover each point. What do you mean by spirits on earth?"

"Why, people—you, I, everybody. We are all spirits, Jack. Some are in the densely materialized form. In other words, people. Others are just ethereal enough to have dropped the body, but are unable to rise to the spheres, which many still in the body can do."

"Spheres! Let me understand."

She looked at him oddly, as if it was a revelation to find any one so ignorant of what was the very A B C of spiritualism to her.

"You know that the world is round?" she demanded.

"I am so taught and believe."

"Exactly. And that it is surrounded by an atmosphere?"

"Yes."

"And beyond the atmosphere—what?"

"The ether."

"So called. It exists only in the imaginings of exact science. Surrounding the earth and every other planet are spirit spheres, more or less developed. In these spheres, to those who live in the spirit, all is as real as what we see materialized on the earth's surface. Permanently materialized, I mean. There is possibly a temporary materialization. You saw an instance of it in the case of Madam Duval the other night. You shall see more. Do you begin to understand?"

"Dimly. If you can see, why cannot I? Why not everybody else?"

"That explanation belongs to a separate chapter, but you can see, and are to be shown how to use your gift. We also hear. Clairvoyance we call seeing; hearing is clairaudience. Sometimes my spirit friends do not waste time showing me pictures. We just converse in the spirit as you and your friends do by word of mouth."

"Do your spirit advisers never make mistakes?"

"Very frequently. Those immediately associated with mortals know but little more than their earthly companions. If we should both be struck dead at the present moment we should simply find ourselves not able to control the movements of our material body, now to be no longer of any service to us, and like all other unserviceable matter to be resolved into its original elements, but our mentality would remain unchanged."

"And then what happens?" demanded Jack interestedly.

"Progression," replied the octoroon. "But enough for to-day. You cannot grasp it all at once. Follow attentively what I am about to say, for it is all of the highest importance to Zitana, and consequently to Arthur Clayton."

They had been walking in the direction of the Maison Rouge while this conversation progressed, and had now passed behind the house. Here the structure appeared to be older and of far more beautiful architectural design. In a way this rear elevation reminded Jack of the front of the New York City Hall. The portion adjoining the river was opened up. Whites and negroes were passing in and out freely. There was a great open doorway in the middle through which Jack could see a broad hall hung with antlers, stuffed snakes, queer birds, and other objects, but beyond this door the veranda was cut off by iron bars reaching to the top of the second story. Every window was barred and tightly closed, shades were drawn inside, while on the roof rose an iron fencing, forty feet high. In short, this wing of the red house was completely cut off from all the rest.

"Just a glance and we'll pass on," whispered Liza. "Never let any one see you staring at the closed wing."

They turned in towards the river. A handsome launch was approaching. Jack saw that Madam Sally sat beside St. Cyr.

"There's old Halevy!" Liza whispered. "But now I must leave you. Remember, I am only a servant in the eyes of St. Cyr. We can't be too careful if we expect to solve the real mystery of La Maison Rouge."

She glided away.

Five minutes later Madam Sally, leaning on the arm of St. Cyr, passed Jack, cutting him with a sneer, while Ringwood put up a monocle and favored the detective with no other recognition than an insolent stare.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MEETING THE NATIVES

JACK wandered on, anxious to see more of this wonderful island in the great Vermilion Swamp.

He passed many pretty bungalows, perhaps fifty altogether. All appeared to be occupied by white people. Beyond seemed like the colored quarters. Many stared at the young man; a few nodded to him, and there were two who attempted to question him, but he was fully determined to be on the alert and give no satisfaction. The first was a good-looking young woman. She was well dressed and in the latest style, as all these people seemed to be. She came forward and, planting herself right in the detective's path, said: "You're a stranger here."

"Yes," replied Jack shortly.

"How did you get in?"

"Through Madam Duval."

"What's your name? Mine is Annette."

"Dobleman. My grandfather was the famous Dobleman."

"Famous for what?"

"His bass voice. He was an opera singer."

"But your name?"

"I'm not telling. Ask Mr. St. Cyr."

"Insolent!" she hissed, her face growing dark. Without answering Jack pressed on.

The other was a young man of about his own age. "Say," he began, coming up to Jack, "do, for heaven's sake, tell us something about the outside world. You are fresh from it, are you not?"

"Yes. I don't know if I'm allowed."

"You're not. But, oh, I am so curious to understand why we are all kept prisoners here."

He trailed away. Presently a rat-faced man passed Jack. He was dressed in white and wore a rapier at his side. "Let's see—you're with Madam Duval's friends, are you not?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I thought so. Say, I wouldn't make any talk with our people, white or black. Mr. St. Cyr don't like it. It might bother Madam Duval to have you get into any trouble."

"I shall follow your advice," replied Jack.

Perhaps others got the tip, too. Nobody spoke to him after that. Passing into the colored quarters, he saw the usual squalor of old slavery days.

At the edge of a bit of woods stood a large, ruinous frame building, one story high, which appeared to have been used as a meeting place in the past.

There was a hideously ugly image, half man, half monkey, standing on a raised platform in the middle of the avenue, which did not appear to have been put to any use in a long time.

Jack was about to turn away when a voice spoke at his side. It was the rat-faced man.

"Glad to see that you followed my advice," he said. "My name is Merrit. I'm third assistant overseer. Who are you?"

"Jack Pryor; servant of Mr. Clayton."

"Who I understand is enormously rich and engaged to the blind lady?"

"I believe that's right."

"Did you see two white sailors in company with a bunch of niggers?"

"No."

"There's two around somewhere."

"Yours?"

"Oh, no. How did you get in?"

"Really, I must refer you to Mr. Clayton. I never express any opinion about my master's affairs."

"You'll do," laughed the overseer, and he started ahead.

"Hold on!" called Jack. "Tell me what that building is where that monkey statue or idol or whatever you call it stands."

"Oh, that's the old obi house," was the reply. "You see, half these niggers are out and out voodoo worshipers, and the other half would be if they dared. St. Cyr would kill them if he knew it."

"Does he hold the power of life and death over these people?"

"You bet he does! Over every mother's son of them, black or white. Why, I'm just as much a prisoner here as the rest, and my father and grandfather were before me."

Jack would have liked to question the man further, but he seemed in a hurry to get away, so he let him go.

Again he bent his steps towards the red house. Presently he ran into two excited men with long horsewhips inquiring for the two sailors whom Jack knew must have come with Ringwood and Madam Sally, for he had seen them in the launch.

He had almost reached his destination when a colored boy informed him that he was to report at Madam Duval's. He did so and was shown into the presence of the Queen of Finance, who sat alone with Professor Roscoe.

"Yes, Halevy," she was saying, "I have learned my lessons. It would not be so bad but for this dreadful drugging. Some day I am certain to get an overdose which will finish me. As matters stand now I don't much care which end of the line I live at. St. Cyr has me, body and soul. What's that you say? Oh, we are no longer alone."

She subsided. The same dull expression came over her face. She seemed like a woman half asleep.

"Arthur has gone up to the red house with Zitana," announced the professor. They were sent for by St. Cyr, whose requests are orders, and whose word nobody ever thinks of questioning here. You, it seemed, are to be entertained here. Madam Duval will follow Zitana presently. Her return is doubtful."

"I'll go for my dope," put in Madam Duval. "Listen, Mr. Pryor, either I am mad here or I am mad when I am outside in the world. I don't pretend to decide which."

"The occult," began Roscoe.

"Fiddlesticks!" broke in Madam Duval. "I'm left constantly doped, that's what's the matter with me. St. Cyr has hundreds of spies paid to help him to turn the trick." She arose and walked heavily from the room.

"Mad?" questioned Jack.

"I'm afraid so," was the reply, "but she has her sane intervals. She knows nothing of her spiritual appearance on the yacht, so say nothing to her about it. She recognizes Zitana as her child. She thought she could make her dance, and so did St. Cyr. Both were mistaken. That power lies solely with me. If they expected her to dance in this place they should have kidnapped the brains along with the legs. But then that was their ignorance. They did not know."

"I understand so little. The place is so perplexing," sighed Jack.

"You know almost as much as I do," replied the professor. "Madam Duval knows little and cares less. She assures me that she comes here when St. Cyr's emissaries change her drug. Many have gone to the lunatic asylum for less. Down here she cares nothing for money; couldn't tell you what she owns or where her holdings are located. Then she suddenly finds herself back in New York, keen and alert and ready for business. Couldn't tell you how she got there; the memory of the Mad Paradise, as she calls it, is like a dream. Dope changed again, probably. Liza declares it's a change of spirit control. How are we poor mortals to tell?"

"For you, professor, it is not necessary to know," spoke a calm, firm voice behind them. "You will never fool that you know. In spite of what is destined there will always be in your mind the element of doubt. Arthur Clayton is not to be allowed to see spirits, and consequently cannot know about them, but for our young friend here it will be different. Within the next forty-eight hours he will be given an insight into the occult, the memory of which he will carry with him to his dying day."

Jack felt a creepy sensation running down his spine.

"Are you on the job, Jack Pryor?" Liza demanded.

"Absolutely," answered Jack. "I am on the job. Do with me as you will."

"Good! To-night we will make a preliminary trip into the land of the occult," said Liza, "but to-morrow will be the supreme test. Halevy!"

"Oh, bless me, I don't want to go," cried the professor.

"Nobody asked you," laughed Liza. "I was only about to remark that you want to keep your mouth shut about this talk."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HISTORY OF AN OLD FAMILY

At La Maison Rouge, Nall St. Cyr was entertaining his friends at an afternoon lunch. Black waiters and waitresses in white jackets and gay turbans glided among the guests, urging nothing upon any one but ready to supply every one's wants.

St. Cyr had made a most elaborate toilette and was ablaze with diamonds, but Madam Duval wore no jewelry. She had very little to say, and with the exception of Zitana, who kept very close to her, no one paid much attention to the woman.

The blind ballet-dancer scarcely spoke except to occasionally whisper to Arthur. Ringwood was, as usual, bold and noisy, but Madam Sally was in her glory. That her manners were perfect and her beauty approached the marvellous Arthur could not deny. She paid little heed to any one but St. Cyr.

"It is odd that we never met in New York society," he had remarked, and she explained that she had never really been much in New York society.

"The professionals are not really admitted, but just get in the way that girl did—by their talents." She waved her fan at Zitana in a contemptuous fashion as she said it. Arthur was furious. Madam Duval looked the woman over with her extra eyeglasses, which she carried pinned to her bosom.

"My daughter is blind, not deaf, Mrs. What's-your-name," she contemptuously replied.

"Ladies! Ladies! No squabbling!" laughed St. Cyr. "The fact is, Zitana was brought here to dance. When it was tried, it didn't work. She could not explain the reason, nor could her mother. We had both seen her dance in New York."

"She can dance now," broke in Madam Duval. "When do you give your party, St. Cyr?"

"To-morrow evening."

"Before I leave I will talk to you privately. How long am I to stay here?"

"Two months anyhow. Now drop that!" The woman of so many millions subsided. St. Cyr turned to Ralph, who was calling out about the acreage of the Paradise.

"Oh, don't ask me," said St. Cyr. "I haven't looked over the maps in years. The tillable land is about twenty miles square, I believe, or twenty square miles. I've forgotten which is most. But it's the biggest. As for the swamp, it embraces about all Vermilion County. You can examine your map and find out what that means."

"Pardon me, but do you raise everything you use?" demanded Madam Sally.

"Everything," was the reply. "With the exception of clothing for the whites nothing is ever brought in from the outside."

"And these white people? You promised you would explain, you know."

"This place was originally known as the great swamp plantation. It was started in French times by Everiste Duval, the then French Governor of Louisiana."

"What relation to me?" broke in Ralph.

"Blessed if I know," answered St. Cyr. "Figure it out for yourself. His period was from 1780 to 1810. He was succeeded by his son, Rene, and an altogether different sort of person—a creature of the Directory and the opening years of the First Empire. Brought up in France, supplied with more money than he could spend, Colonel Duval came to regard the swamp plantation as a gold mine simply inexhaustible. What wonder then that he fled to it at the downfall of Napoleon. He was then well on in years. He never returned to France. Devoted to music, dramatic art, literature and the like, he tried to draw the popular stars of those days around him. They came. They performed for him, but though he showered money upon them they would not remain. The life at the Paradise was too lonely. This man's period was from 1810 to 1820 odd. A St. Cyr was his steward. A St. Cyr has been steward ever since."

His little eyes snapped as he said this. He moistened his lips with a glass of Chateau Magneaux.

"This Rene cared nothing for the fine arts, but his son inherited all his grandfather's tastes," continued St. Cyr. "Still he could get no first-class artist to remain here. Reasons arose for secrecy. Rene Duval began kidnaping his artists. He got 'em as best he could. He never allowed them to get away. They died here, leaving their descendants behind them, who know nothing of the outside world, yet some of them were superb performers on musical instruments as well as vocalists. Others were artists of real merit. None now survive who were kidnaped. The last was a violinist in 187— something. He is dead."

"You forget Zitana, the famous blind ballet-dancer," said Arthur, passing an arm about the girl's waist.

"True," replied St. Cyr. "But it is not my intention to hold her. She has seen nothing. Moreover, she is Madam Duval's daughter. The period of this Rene was 1820—1860. He then died, leaving everything to his son Rene, who was a Colonel in the Confederate Army. 'Ole Massa,' the colored folks called him. There are some among them now who fancy he is living still. If so he will be one hundred and fifteen years old. His son was the husband of our friend, Mrs. Duval, and the father of the blind girl. He died in 1820 although he was erroneously supposed to have been drowned in Paris at an earlier date. He lived to rescue his wife under most romantic circumstances. What sort of a man he was she best knows. And that finishes my story."

He paused. Ringwood waited with bated breath for what was to follow, but nothing followed. "You were saying something about being at the end of your story," he nervously reminded.

"Yes. That's the end. I never go over the same ground twice. Fill the glasses, Sardanapalus. Don't be afraid of the wine, gentlemen. It is the very best. Well, Mose, what are you wanting, my boy?"

"To see massa outside a moment," replied a colored man of rougher mold appearing in the doorway.

"Be with you in a minute," assured St. Cyr. He made his apologies and passed out.

Arthur, watching, saw Madam Sally make a sign to Ralph, who also left the room, nor was Madam Sally long behind him.

Zitana seemed to sense the situation. "They are all going out, Arthur dear," she whispered. "Don't you go. It's not necessary. Many a night I've dreamed of you—of both of us. I always see us two coming out all right where others are in dreadful trouble."

Outside, among the shrubbery, St. Cyr stood talking in French with the colored man. Perhaps he did not know he had listeners. Perhaps he did not care. Certainly there could be no place better adapted for their concealment.

They talked but a moment; then the man went away and St. Cyr passed back on to the veranda and into the house.

No sooner had he vanished than Ralph showed himself from one side of a big Forsythia bush and the movie star from the other. "That man's a king here," whispered Madam Sally. "He holds the power of life and death."

"So it would seem," retorted Ringwood sulkily. "And you?"

"Ralph, I intend to be Queen, and if you are good I shall make you prime minister."

They walked away, and for the moment this would appear to have completed the number of eavesdroppers, when the woman Liza suddenly stepped into view and started for the road. In an instant each had joined her.

"It's a pity you don't understand French," remarked Liza, "and it's lucky I happened to be here."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Jack curiously.

"Why, it seems that two white sailors brought in here by Ringwood have been taken up by the colored folks. They have been pumping our people full of information about the outside world—something never allowed. That man who called him out was hired by St. Cyr to play the spy and report."

"And the result of his work?"

"The two men may die for their loquaciousness."

"Does St. Cyr dare?"

"He dares anything. There's to be an obi feast here in a few days. They may be held for human sacrifice."

As they strolled on aimlessly Jack asked Liza more about her own connection with the place. "You claim to have been born here, yet no one is allowed to leave the Paradise and return," he remarked. "How do you account for that?"

"Accident," replied the octoroon. "My mother was the personal slave of the wife of the second Rene Duval. Shortly after I was born she was taken out into the world; in other words, to New Orleans. Mrs. Duval died. Mother and I were sold to the Hernandez family—the present Madam Duval's people. Later mother was bought back by Mrs. Ringwood, one of the Duval daughters, while I went to Paris with Adele and Halevy."

"And when you returned after Adele was supposed to have been drowned?"

"Listen! That was indeed strange. My mistress was rescued by her husband, who had erroneously been reported dead. Duval was in a yacht and had come out of Vermilion Bay where he had taken refuge from the storm, just in time to see his wife throw herself into the sea. Of course he did not recognize her then—not till later. Delirious at first, when Adele regained her reason there was a reconciliation. She was taken to Paradise and I afterward met them and went along with her. Meanwhile Halevy and Zitana had vanished. It was a long time before I learned their fate. Then I had long been separated from Adele. How it came about don't matter. It isn't worth while saying any more. Meet me at the big tulip-tree at ten this evening. I will put in an appearance just as soon as St. Cyr goes by and we will make the most of our time."

They strolled on, Lize explaining many things about spiritualism. As they passed the Voodoo temple she glanced at it shudderingly.

"House of wickedness," she muttered. "Many a time was my poor mother made to act as high priestess to their wicked rites."

"Has the place been used lately?" asked Jack.

"I am told not," replied Liza; "but mark you, once the Voodoos are aroused they will act in defiance of all the St. Cyrs ever born and it will end, as it always ends, in human sacrifice. What odds? He don't care. He'll try it once too often, though."

They passed on and soon separated. Jack was with Arthur and Zitana at dinner, but he did not force himself upon them.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DEALINGS WITH THE DEAD

JACK left Madam Duval's early in the evening and put in time wandering about in the moonlight. He felt that he was destined to enter upon a new world that night. He had been immensely taken up with Liza, but then the old octoroon had gone out of her way to attract him.

Promptly on time he was at the tulip-tree, where he concealed himself. In a few moments St. Cyr passed. He was smoking and walked with a confident air. He had no sooner gone than the octoroon showed herself.

"We have got a safe hour to work in," she announced, "but cannot safely claim any more. Remember, this is only preliminary to our work to-morrow. We will seek my mother's old room, and there try our luck. It has always been denied me. I have been assured that in connection with a man I was to solve the mystery of the closed wing of La Maison Rouge."

"I am supposed to be the man?" asked the detective, smilingly.

"I believe it. These rooms have not been opened up since Maum Liza died."

She had produced an electric flash-light which enabled her to see to light a small night lamp. The Victrola stood in a corner and Liza wound it up and started it on a waltz. "Wouldn't something in the line of a hymn be more appropriate?" inquired Jack.

Liza laughed. "That's the way with all you beginners in spiritualism," she rejoined. "I want my mother. She was not partial to hymns when in the body——"

"But the religious side of it," persisted Jack.

"There! Now you have spoken!" cried Liza. "Listen; if you or any one else ever expects to make any headway in spiritualism the religious side of it must be forgotten, for it don't exist. Spiritualism is a philosophy. Why did these people respect Maum Ziza? Because she was the link between those in the body and those who had lost control of it. In other words, a medium. She could foretell the future with wonderful accuracy. She could heal the sick and raise the seeming dead. Actually, Jack Pryor, there is no such thing as death in spiritualism."

She placed the little Victrola in a corner, and producing a black curtain, strung it across.

"What do you use that for?" demanded Jack. "To a stranger it looks like clap-trap."

"It is nothing of the sort," replied the octoroon. "Spirits can travel only on waves of mental harmony. The repetition of the waltz establishes such harmony between your brain and mine. The spirit seizes the wave and there is something done."

"But the curtain," persisted Jack. "Why cannot this so-called spirit phenomena be done in the light?"

"Because it is against spirit law. When you'll tell me why a photographic plate cannot be developed in broad daylight I'll answer your last question. Be reasonable, Pryor. Spirits only know a little more than we do. There are certain things they can do and others they cannot, while there are also those vain and foolish enough to try the impossible, and even to resort to fraud to accomplish their ends."

She produced cloths and covered the windows with black ones, then hung a white cloth across the folding door. A tiny night lamp was lighted and placed so that what light it shed—a mere glimmer, after passing through a pane of orange-colored glass, was reflected on the white sheet.

"The orange ray," muttered Jack, who dabbled with photography.

"Sure," replied the octoroon. "It can be done without it, but it's a great help. Now let them do their best or worst while we talk. Let's see, what was the question you asked me?"

"If I was to die now, where should I go?"

"Nowhere. I'm speaking of your mentality, which is your real self. It would stop right here."

"But——"

"Wait, Jack. I'm going to use the word 'spirit' in connection with all who have lost control of the body—the natural body, I mean, which is an inferior reproduction of the spirit body. If you will accept these few terms it will be a great help."

"I accept them. Should I know that I was dead—had become a spirit?"

"Not unless some one told you. Let us assume that Arthur or the professor entered. You could see them, but they could not see you. They could and probably would walk right through you, and you do the same by them. Here we have another great spirit law—the passage of matter through matter. Remember your New Testament—'Lazarus, come forth!' cried our Saviour, and out of the sealed sepulchre—for it surely was sealed—walks the so-called dead. He was dead. Our Saviour chose to give this spirit a new hold on the body. I have seen much of spiritualism, but I never saw that done nor do I ever expect to."

"But you said just now you could raise the dead!"

"In another way. By materialization. Altogether a different plan. There was nothing to prevent Lazarus from living several years, while my materialized spirit is only good for a few hours at the most, and——"

"Liza, wind up that there music-box," interrupted a sepulchral voice. To Jack the words spoken over by the sheet were startling.

"Yes, maum!" replied the octoroon, and she obeyed. Jack strained his eyes to the limit, but could see nothing.

When Liza was back in her seat the voice spoke again: "Liza, I'm here to help you. There's going to be a great overturn in Paradise to-morrow night. Several will lose their mortal lives."

"Maum, I sensed it. 'Twas I who impressed it on you, child."

"Do any of the white party who I am immediately interested in appear on the list?"

"Our Adele does, but she will be saved. Hide her by the pecan tree, where the bushes are thick. Say to our young man that by eight in the evening he must have Halevy and the girl as near the same place as he can get them."

Then there was silence.

"Tell me more, maum?"

"No more. Leave something for us to do. We are not dead over here, if you please."

"Will you tell me what's going to happen?"

"No. Listen: Don't try to show this boy too much. He has in him the makings of a grand medium, and will be one some day, but you'll have no hand in it. Listen, Liza. What you are looking for is to break up the power of St. Cyr, and end the mystery of the closed end of La Maison Rouge."

"Shall we succeed?"

"Can't tell you, but I think so. It will not break up Paradise. It will only change things. In these changes we shall have no part."

"I see. Are you going to show yourself, maum?"

"No, gal. It will take too much force. We want it for to-morrow night."

"Do something for this boy, maum. Just to oblige me."

"Wait a minute. Get your music-box going. Don't speak. Boy, think of something you would like to see."

Silence followed for fully ten minutes. The Victrola was wound twice. Suddenly the voice called:

"You were thinking of the great fire in your native town two years ago, on which occasion some three hundred people were burned to death. You are curious to know what the first sensations of the dead were upon coming back to life. Am I right?"

"You are."

"Very good. Watch the sheet. Don't speak unless spoken to."

The wait seemed a long one, but it was only a matter of minutes before there suddenly appeared on the sheet a perfectly accurate representation of a building in flames. Men and women were pouring out by doors, windows, etc. In short, it was a perfect representation of a factory fire. Many lay on the ground dying or dead.

"Right?" called the voice.

"Exactly as I saw it," returned Jack. "It's wonderful! If

such a picture could be thrown on the screens, who would fail to believe in spiritualism?"

"Isn't it being done every day? Only thing they haven't reached the point where they can photograph a man's memory. My husband works with a bunch of movie people. He tells me they'll come to it mighty soon now. But this here don't answer your question. I'll change now and show you how the dead acted when they found they were still alive. Liza, you keep that music of yours going or I shall lose all power. That will be the end of it. Now, mind."

Liza wound up the Victrola again.

"The music breathes a current," explained Liza. "Here on earth we know a few currents—higher sound—the electric, they say. In the spirit world there are thousands of currents which will soon be revealed to mortals——"

"Seems to me," broke in Maum Liza's voice, "I'se running tings here." There was silence for a moment and then the voice called out: "Look!"

It was the burnt factory. The fire had been extinguished. Many of those known to Jack to have perished stood contemplating their own corpses.

"Last condition!" called the voice. "It is as far as I shall be permitted to go."

"Keep the music ergwine, Liza," said the mother. "There's such a bunch of 'em trying to put in deir oar here. Say, it's 'stracting. I—looker here, boy, I was to show you a familiar face and let you hear a familiar voice. I advise you to let me show your main control for yo' own sake."

"Very well," assented Jack.

Silence. Suddenly, in an altogether different tone, the voice called excitedly:

"Say, Liza!"

"Who is it, maum?"

"Dar's a spirit hyar who says he's one of the Duvals, and to tell you that Adele gal's gwine ter recover her rights."

"Oh, maum! If it only proves true!"

Suddenly a face was flashed on the curtain. It was a young man about Jack's own age.

"Nick!" cried the detective."

"I am Nick, Jack, spoke a different voice, "as sure as I'm your present control."

"How long?"

"Ever since I was drowned at Horseneck."

"Are you happy, Nick?"

"Say, old man, you can't guess how the spirits hate that question. Of course I'm happy. Good-by, Jack. I knew I was your guide, but couldn't get at you. Your mother says turn off the music, Madam Memphis. She'll do her best about those keys you want."

That ended it. As Jack walked homeward with Liza he heard a rustle in the bushes and a whispering. Lights flashed and some one said: "Now, there! Let her go!"

"Keep back!" breathed Liza. "It means death to be discovered."

But Jack was no coward. What the octoroon saw he saw. The two white sailors from Ringwood's yacht were hung to a tree by the white man who had accosted him during the afternoon, and half a dozen blacks assisted.

St. Cyr stepped into view, puffing a cigarette.

"Shall we leave him hang, master?" the white man asked.

"For a few days—yes," was the reply. That will settle this spirit of unrest which they have stirred up."

The others remained silent.

"Come away," breathed Liza, pulling at Jack. "To be discovered spells certain death."

Madam Duval was the only person in evidence when they reached home. Jack and Titana were out walking.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE INTERRUPTED FEAST

NEXT morning Arthur came over to Madam Duval's early, and he and Jack had a long talk.

"It's a shame to bar you out of the red house and treat you as a servant, Jack," Arthur declared, "but what am I going to do? Somebody has informed this man St. Cyr about your profession.

"It is far better so," replied Jack. "I am learning a lot we ought to know which I could not learn as St. Cyr's guest. I'm resolved to solve the mystery of the closed wing. Watch me. You'll see."

"Is that a closed wing? What do they keep it closed for?"

"I have no idea. It is one of the many mysteries of La Maison Rouge. But tell me, do you find you love Titana as dearly as ever?"

"More so. Isn't she a darling?"

"I have scarcely spoken to her."

"Well, we'll correct that. She dances to-night."

"I'll let you into a secret. She can't dance her best unless hypnotized by Halevy. Then she is her mother over again."

"Does Titana know this?"

"Of course, and she told her mother, but they kept it from St. Cyr. Here, have a cigar!"

"How is Madam Sally getting on? I see she has made a dead set for St. Cyr."

"Yes, and will get him if not interfered with. Ringwood's claim on the estate isn't worth a bad jitney. Strange about Madam Duval; she seems manifestly insane."

"I'm afraid so," answered Jack, and they soon parted.

As the day wore on Jack kept a sharp watch. That there was great excitement seething among the negroes was certain. The remains of the two dead sailors served to increase the excitement. Late in the day Arthur received a warning. There was less difficulty in persuading Madam Duval to hide herself. She was afraid and showed it.

"After all, will he bother to get away if I can take my daughter with me," she declared. "Everything I eat is being drugged. I'll get busy with Halevy at once. We will go straight to New York and put ourselves in the hands of Hight, Hammil & Todd. I'm tired of this life. It's driving me mad."

During the morning the voodoo house was cleaned and the monkey god washed and scoured. Liza happened along while Jack was watching.

"Wha' doin', Uncle Chris?" she asked of a very old colored man.

"I'se got orders tew clean up, Liza; dat's all. Your mah been talkin' to me, if you want to know."

"She your guide?"

"Claims to be."

"Gwine to dish up any one of the obi to-night?"

The old man's face changed. The rest of the talk was in a dialect altogether strange to Jack.

Later Liza contrived to meet him, and explained.

"It's serious," she said. "There are to be two sacrifices to the obi—a white virgin and a white devil. They have them picked out. They will be roasted alive. The entertainment is to be in progress at La Maison Rouge in the voodoo temple. If the whites attempt to interfere they will be massacred. Those rascally white sailors managed to distribute knives among the blacks. Something tells me we are in for a terrible night. See Arthur and talk it over with him. Zitana is the virgin the darkies may want to sacrifice. The male devil is Ralph Ringwood, who is already a prisoner. The instant the dance is completed Zitana had better get aboard the launch, where we will remain ready to start at an instant's notice. Make the boatman understand he is not to wait for me. In case of an outburst I shall be one of the first persons they will seek to detain."

"And myself?" urged Jack.

"We can decide better this evening. Remember our appointment. The door of the closed wing at eight."

"I shan't forget," replied Arthur; "but tell me, did you get the keys?"

"My mother proposes to try the difficult stunt of extracting St. Cyr's keys from his pocket and putting them into mine. So-long, Jack, until the appointed time."

Jack and the professor were much interested in watching the white folk. All without distinction, except certain very young children, appeared to have been invited to the entertainment. They made no alterations in their appearance. All wore white. The hour was five o'clock when as many as three hundred were served food in the big dining-room by colored waiters.

Arthur told Jack that he and Zitana were to eat pri-

vately with St. Cyr, Ralph and Madam Sally after the entertainment. "There is some trouble about Ringwood," he went on to say to Jack. "He hasn't been seen since morning. Could it be that he was one of the two white men they say were hanged last night?"

"No; he was not," replied Jack. "I saw them both."

For uniqueness and absolute perfection St. Cyr's feast excelled anything of the sort Arthur had ever attended.

Jack was equally impressed with his private view. Talent along every line was represented.

The musical programme embraced violin solos and combinations; cello obligatos, etc. The performers—descendants of famous artists in their line—knew their business, for much practice had made them master of their instruments. Whole scenes from old masterpieces in the way of operas and operattes were performed.

Then came dancing.

Halevy held Zitana ready, and when the signal came she burst upon the assemblage like a vision from another world.

"Who would believe Zitana was hypnotized?" the movie star muttered.

"She told me, but I wouldn't believe it," replied St. Cyr. He tried to arouse some enthusiasm in her, but failed.

"I used to dance like that once," she replied. "But that was long ago."

"Better or worse?" demanded St. Cyr.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the answer. "I——"

Right here there came a loud, sickening report, and everybody sprang to their feet, for the Maison Rouge was rocking on its foundations.

Her lips moved, she took a step in advance, then she vanished.

At the same time an awful cry, as from hundreds of throats of frightened people, rent the air.

Arthur flung his arms about Zitana and caught Madam Duval's hands.

"What is it, St. Cyr, what is it?" Madam Sally gasped.

"I think," replied St. Cyr, "that the voodoo worshipers have begun their operations and that their racket, in combination with an approaching thunderstorm, is responsible. We had best break up here as quietly as possible, friends. Have no fears. Use the old swords freely if you are attacked, but not otherwise. Get the ladies home as quickly as possible," he urged. "Open the door to nobody. This revel will pass with the night. Remember, Arthur Clayton, I am powerless to aid you in this emergency. Mrs. Fantime, take my advice and go along with them."

"I won't," replied Madam Sally. "I'm no coward, and this is the time to prove it. "I stick to you, St. Cyr."

"At your own risk, then," he answered.

Meanwhile the thunder was rattling, accompanied by a brilliant electrical play. Incessant cries came from the direction of the voodoo shrine.

Arthur wondered where Jack was. More than once did it cross his mind that he might never see him again.

The professor without comment helped in hurrying the ladies along.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A NIGHT OF HORROR

JACK was on time at the meeting with Liza. Immediately after Zitana's first dance he had gone out feeling that he had no right to delay.

As he passed through the shadows of the gathering storm he did not fail to notice considerable stir and movement among the colored people; but it all seemed to be directed towards the voodoo house, around which he could see even from a distance that a great crowd had gathered.

Just then Liza appeared from some concealment.

"Waiting for me, Jack?" she quietly asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Listen! In a minute there will be a big noise. Some time ago an old cannon was unearthed. It is loaded. They are going to blow it off. The chances are it will explode and kill some of them. While the excitement lasts we will get in our fine work."

"Did you get the keys?"

"I found a bunch of keys in my pocket. It remains to be seen what they are. We will put them to the test right now."

Evidently they were the keys, for Liza had no difficulty whatever in opening the outer door of the closed wing.

She lighted a lantern, closed the door, and glanced around.

The hall was bare and cold, and a flight of stairs led upward. As the light of Liza's lantern struck the stairs Jack gave a start.

"There has been a big crowd of people here recently," he declared.

"You are right," responded Liza. "I am wondering what it can mean."

"Shall it stop you?"

"Not in the least. It probably means that some one else shares my views and had butted in ahead of us. But follow quickly, Jack. If I can't solve this long, startling mystery, the quicker we all leave here the better. Murder, arson, cannibalism and other atrocities are going to be committed here to-night."

"That would be terrible."

She led the way upstairs through barren corridors. Keys were not needed, for locks had been broken everywhere. At

last they entered a room where one piece of furniture covered all its contents.

"As I thought," muttered Liza. "Here the poor wretch has existed for over half a century. Dreadful! What an existence! May God reward us all according to our deserts!"

Evidently a man had sat and lain here, but there was no trace of him now.

"Who was he?" demanded Jack.

"The first Rene Duval," Liza replied. "The one they could never prove dead."

"How old would he be?"

"About one hundred and thirty years."

"Ole, massa! Ole, massa! If we uns could only find out about ole massa. That's been the cry among the blacks for many years."

The explosion referred to now followed.

"That goes for nothing. Let's get out," said Liza."

"Hold on!" breathed Jack.

He peered through the window.

"St. Cyr has seen us!" he muttered. "He is out there with Ringwood. He points to our window and gives the fellow a good shaking-up."

"Listen while I prophesy," said Liza. "It's the last we shall see of either of them. Take it from me."

Jack peered through the window. St. Cyr and Ringwood were still struggling. Belabored people were scurrying in all directions. As St. Cyr and Ringwood moved on the old white-headed darky peered in a window and caught Liza by the arm.

"Did yo' heah de obi speak, Liza?" he asked. "Want to be sharp—dey's lookin' fo' you. Dey t'ink dey got de ole massa. Dey want you to try your hand, so you better come erlong with me."

"I must attend on one of the virgins, Uncle Nick. That's my part—dancing girl."

"De darkies got her. She'll be saved. Dunno what dey'll do about t'other. Dey was gwine to use dat ar big yaller-headed blonde, but dey tell me she won't fit in, nohow."

He hurried away.

"Can it be that they have got Zitana away from Arthur?" mused Jack in alarm.

"Gimme a minute to ask my control," was the answer.

"No, they haven't; but they will. You must save her. I am to provide a spirit helper for the job. She's rough, but she's reliable at a time like this."

"Materialized?"

"Sure. Jack, set this saturnalia in full swing and you won't be able to tell spirits from mortals. Dead niggahs are great ones for building up a human form."

They were passing the voodoo house. A wild dance was in progress around the monkey god.

"Liza! Come, Liza! We want you, Liza," was heard on all sides. Liza forced her way into the crowd.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "Don't you go too far to-night. Let there be no bloodshed."

"We'll have our obi feast, and don't you forget it," retorted one of the men. "We done break into de closed wing. Dis am what we found." The speaker threw aside a colored cloth, revealing a mummy, which Liza surveyed with intense curiosity.

"I always knew you existed, but I never expected to see you," she muttered.

"What am it, Liza?" The man questioned a crowd pressing around.

"Anybody here who recognizes the thing?" questioned the octoroon.

"We tinkum him old massa," replied Uncle Nick. "But how we gwine to prove it?"

"Who remembers old massa when he was, say sixty years old?" demanded Liza.

"I do," admitted Nick, "and so did several others. Nobody seemed to remember him any younger.

"Hold your jaw and I'll do my best. Who plays the banjo to-night? Gus Brown? If he's here let him pick up a tune. All who remember old massa think of him, and watch the mummy. But—wait! I have to attend to another matter first. Lavinia! Lavinia! Come, Lavinia! Come, I say! Come!"

She kept up this call for some time and at last the big black woman's materialization stood before her.

"Look after him," she said, pointing to Jack. "Sharp, now! Can you hold out that long?"

"Guess I ken to-night," Lavinia answered. "Your ma tole me I should be wanted. I was pumping in power; dat's what made me so long appearin'."

"Stick to her, Jack. She'll look out for me," Liza said, and she turned to the mummy.

"Come on," growled Lavinia.

Meanwhile Liza worked with all possible rapidity with her hands above the head of the mummy.

"Take on last condition," she kept repeating. Jack's eyes were rivited upon her. He looked about for Lavinia. She had vanished.

He forgot her, for at last a form began to come together behind the mummy; an ugly old man of seventy. He looked about in a dazed fashion.

"This is different," he muttered. "What do you want me to sign? I am one hundred and thirty-two. Hold on, woman! Where's St. Cyr—I don't see St. Cyr! They say there's been murder done to-night, and there's going to be more of it. I am owner of all this place. I——"

Jack stole away, and looked everywhere for Lavinia. He believed that he had lost her, and that she had gone back where she belonged.

Suddenly Arthur came rushing up to him.

"Oh, Jack!" he gasped, "they've got Zitana. I only turned my back on her a moment, while I was getting her mother on the launch. The niggers are fighting furiously. The whites have been using swords, but the colored folks have them on the run. What an awful night!"

"Awful, indeed. Rain was now pouring in torrents—the lightning display was tremendous.

Suddenly Lavinia's materialization appeared to Zitana and her captors near the launch.

"Nice boys, youse," she growled. "Get her to her maw."

"I'se used up and hev jist gotter go back to spirit-land. I——"

"Gee! What's dat?" yelled one of the black men. "I would er killed a nigger wench sure, on'y she's already dead. Dat form seems to hab gone away frum me to de gal."

"Huh! La Maison Rouge is all aflame! Reckon dis yere am de judgment day," yelled another darky.

With this Lavinia vanished. Jack and Arthur lost not an instant in getting Zitana, who was quite unconscious, away from the negroes and aboard the launch. Both had seen an electrical ball strike her. Arthur feared for her life, but Jack, remembering the prophecy, had hopes.

Professor Roscoe received them on board in a high state of excitement.

"Madam Duval," he explained, "just wouldn't stay below. I was trying to get her back, and Arthur turned to help. When we went to look for Zitana she was gone."

"'Twas that woman's fault I got in trouble," said Zitana.

It was a relief to hear her voice again. Arthur had feared for her life.

"You mean Madam Sally," asked Arthur.

"I mean that wicked, wicked actress," was the answer. "Even the voodoo worshipers wouldn't use her in their rites, to judge by what was said. But why do I feel so queer? Why do I see so many more objects? I'm always seeing strange visions, but this is the limit. Why, Arthur, dear, I can even see you! You don't look a bit like what I thought you did."

Arthur answered soothingly; but Jack's heart jumped.

"Was it a massacre?" asked Madam Duval.

"Not exactly," replied Jack. "St. Cyr gave old swords to the whites, and the blacks have got hold of knives, and there was a fierce fight. I believe the lightning to have set fires in the tower. But be that as it may, pandemonium is bound to reign here for days to come. We want to get on the move."

"Liza!"

Most emphatically did Madam Duval speak the name. "She alone can save me," she declared. "Liza is a witch-woman, like her mother before her. St. Cyr has doped and bewitched her. Liza alone can save me. What do you know

of her, young man?" she added suddenly, turning to the detective.

"Nothing," replied Jack. "She put me in the hands of a colored woman who has also vanished. I can't help you a bit."

"We mustn't leave here without her."

"Wait," said Arthur. "Let's have a look. There's noise enough inside to cover any emergency. Come on deck, Jack."

What they saw was startling enough.

An octoroon was being pursued by a mob of white and black men, some with torches, others with swords, others with the boughs of trees.

It was Liza!

She waved her hand forward and ran on.

There was no mistaking her meaning.

"She orders us to start at once," announced Jack, "and that is what I propose to do.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CONCLUSION

IT was only the matter of a moment getting the launch under way.

Jack had provided axes, hammers, saws, etc., and was ready to attack the big gates.

Arthur watched the chase on shore. Suddenly it ended. Liza vanished—how or where he could not make out. He drove the launch on until certain that the mob had taken the back track, then he turned on his course, reached shore, and soon had the satisfaction of taking Liza aboard.

"I'm dreadfully used up," she panted. "I must sleep ten minutes. Got Zitana all right?"

"Yes, indeed."

"I'll sleep first and then see her." She dropped into a chair the instant they entered the cabin.

"Strenuous work this living as I live, objectively in two worlds," she muttered. "But now for the sleep."

Jack went into the cabin.

Madam Duval was in one stateroom, Zitana in the other, while Arthur sat leisurely smoking. He and the professor seemed to have been having words over something.

"Got her, Jack?" Arthur asked.

"She has dropped asleep in the other cabin."

"Confound it! Everybody's dropping asleep. Madam Duval declares she can't keep awake. Zitana claims that the same drowsiness has got her eyes and has gone to bed, while the professor here appears to be hugging some mystery which he won't tell me."

"Which he will tell you, providing you'll promise not to bother Zitana with it to-night," the professor promptly replied.

"But suppose it's something she ought to know."

"Let Arthur decide," said Jack. "It is his right."

The professor thought for a moment, and then gave in.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I've been watching the girl closely. I believe she's beginning to see!"

"So do I!" cried Jack. "I'll be hanged if I don't."

"Her sight was knocked out by a thunderbolt. She was hit by one to-night. I saw it strike her. Let us hope it has restored her sight. Patience till morning, Arthur. Then we shall see. Pray by that time we shall be through the big gates."

They were through them by three o'clock. Jack came on deck to find but one yacht—*La Zitana*.

"T'other feller simply sailed away. I couldn't stop him," declared Captain Kellerman. "He's a bad one—as bad as his employers. But what's all this I hear about a revolution?"

"There has been an uprising of blacks against whites ashore," answered Arthur. "I'll tell you all I know about it as the morning advances. Ringwood we believe to be dead. As for Mrs. Fantime, we don't know. Anyway, we rescued the girl."

"Good! And you would like to start at once?" asked the captain.

"Yes; we are now heading direct for New Orleans. Get us there as quick as possible. That's all the orders I have to give."

It was broad daylight before six o'clock. A perfect chorus of bird songs issued from the wonderful tangle of shrubbery. Arthur, whose artistic tastes were always uppermost, burst out in admiration of the wild scenery as they ran through a flock of love birds which had to be actually driven from their faces.

"Jack," he asked, "why is it that amid such glorious surroundings it always has to be that man is the one thing vile?"

"It isn't so everywhere," retorted Jack. "How far could a fellow go along upper Fifth avenue and find non-vile men among the millionaires? Here comes the professor to join us. Now we shall know something definite about Zitana. Good-morning, professor. Don't keep us on the anxious-seat. Has Zitana's sight been restored?"

"In part, at least, it has," replied the professor. "She's now with Liza, and, oh, so happy over it. There was some sort of prophecy about her, it seems."

"Will she be with us soon?" Arthur asked.

"At breakfast."

"How is Madam Duval?"

"Why, much the same as yesterday. She seems quite indignant that she has not forgotten all of us at the same time. She is very proud of the work we put in on her affairs yesterday. I believe St. Cyr must be dead, for she keeps saying:

"'Anyhow, those old devils of his have got me as they used to.'"

"We will anticipate breakfast with all impatience," said Arthur. "Meantime every minute is bringing us nearer New Orleans. I shall have an experiment made which I propose to try out to a finish."

Coffee and fruit were served by Yama.

About eight o'clock Liza joined them.

"Zitana can surely see, but it's all very strange to her. Did either of you see the fire bolt strike her?"

"We both saw it," returned Arthur. "It seemed to me that it rolled along her forehead over the eyes, and then down her face, disappearing as it touched the shoulder."

"It seemed the same to me," added Jack.

"And I believe that is what it did," said Liza."

Zitana's sight had been fully restored in the same way in which she was deprived of it.

Madam Duval was wild with joy. She could talk of nothing else.

"I don't care if I am not worth a dollar. I'll live with you, Arthur; I've got a daughter now."

"Why does she go on so after quitting Paradise?" Jack questioned Liza.

"Listen," replied the octoroon. "I believe the spirit controlling that awful mummy is responsible for that. He may have been a Duval spirit or not. You can't believe a word such spirits say. In addition, it's my belief that he operated the Madam Duval which the world knew. Wait! Leave it to me. I'll find out from my guides and tell you."

The *La Zitana* was drawing near New Orleans now. Jack and Arthur had had their heads together much of the time. There were two shabby old account books that had been very carefully studied.

The professor was not taken into the secret, nor was Liza. When the *La Zitana* finally tied up at a wharf the whole party went direct to the St. Charles Hotel. They had eaten lunch and only remained there a minute. Arthur and Jack afterward turned up at an old building on Jackson street, where they ascended to a certain office. A determined-looking young man now accompanied them.

The door bore the sign "B. Bassier, Attorney." Below was "Duval Estate."

"He's in, as we happen to know," whispered Jack. "Arthur, are you good for him?"

"Sure," replied Arthur.

Thereupon Arthur started to boldly open the office door.

"Locked," he breathed.

"Let me try," said the stranger. Seizing the knob, he gave the door a smart kick and it flew open.

An elderly man dressed in white, with a huge solitaire diamond in his shirt front, sat in an easy-chair smoking a cigarette.

"What means this intrusion?" he cried. "Who the deuce are you?"

"The same bunch that telephoned from Police Headquarters, Mr. St. Cyr," answered the stranger. "You said you would try to have Mr. Bassier here to meet us. Anything doing in that line?"

"No; he hasn't been in since."

Arthur kicked the door shut. "Nor he won't be in," he cried. "He is a myth, and has been these many years. You and your brother in Paradise, if he still lives, are sole Southern representatives of the Duval estate."

The man frowned darkly.

"You forget Madam Duval," he grunted.

"Not at all. She is now in my charge."

"Who are you?"

"Arthur Clayton. I intend to marry Mrs. Duval's daughter."

"The blind one?"

"There is no blind one. I refer to the one who was kidnaped and taken to Paradise, from where we have rescued her. This has put us to some expense. I will thank you for a check for $10,000,000 to cover it."

"Are you mad? Am I giving $10,000,000 checks to strangers? Not on your life. Why, to hear you talk one would think that Paradise was a paying institution instead of the heavy annual loss it is."

"The loss is a lie. The sugar profits of Paradise alone are worth half a million a year."

"Say, are you crazy? Do you claim to hold a warrant for my arrest?"

"Show it, please, Mr. Symes. Say, St. Cyr, if there's any way of calling up Paradise I advise doing it."

With a smothered curse the man seized the telephone and called a city number. There was a prompt answer. Then he began to talk.

"That you, Alf?" he demanded.

Jack could catch the replies.

"Yes."

"Anything wrong in Paradise?"

"That's what we can't seem to find out."

"You've sent men in, of course."

"Yes, but nobody has come out again as yet."

"And my brother?"

"We can get no tidings of him."

"Call me up the moment you hear anything definite."

He hung up the receiver.

"Were you there?" he demanded.

"I was," answered Arthur. "So was this gentleman."

"Do you know my brother?"

"Perfectly."

"I believe him to be dead."

"If I refuse to give up this money?"

"The whole story of this long swindle will be given to the evening papers and your arrest reported."

"Very well. I will draw a check for $200,000. For the order of Miss Zitana Duval, I suppose?"

"Waste of time," retorted Arthur, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Four hundred thousand, and nothing but cash will suit."

St. Cyr sprang to his feet.

"Then you prefer arrest and publicity," Arthur urged. "Now it's half a million. I shall go no higher. Lay that amount in large gold notes on that table while we wait, or the arrest and publicity will come without further argument."

Twenty minutes later Arthur and Jack walked into the Duval sitting-room at the St. Charles, and threw a package in front of Liza as Zitana sprang up to greet him.

"Who says Arthur Clayton's no business man?" he cried.

"Half a million, and yours to keep, you dear good soul. It's only a trifle of what Madam Duval is being robbed of every year. Just give me time to get in my fine work and you shall see!"

Madam laughed. "Go for 'em, boy! Go for 'em!" she cried. "I admire your spunk. Make me understand, Halevy. I'm sure it's right, because it's Arthur's and Zitana's. No blindness now. Good is good. Let's get back to New York just as quick as ever we can."

Hight, Hammil & Todd simply laughed when Arthur raised the question about Madam Duval's wealth.

"Duval, who really loved his wife, put the whole matter in our hands," said Todd. "She may be crazy," he continued, "but I never thought so. Most certainly there are times when she has displayed the greatest shrewdness. The woman is easily worth ten millions in New York and New Orleans real estate. As for the Paradise proposition, it's a big thing, but it requires a level-headed business man to run it. We've never attempted to fool with it, leaving those fakirs, the St. Cyr brothers, undisturbed. We stand ready to take the matter up any time you say the word, however. I shouldn't wonder if half a million a year could be cleaned up on that old plantation. It is absolutely Madam Duval's, but she must will it to Zitana. Ralph Ringwood's claim was not to be considered."

Thus Mr. Todd. It proved exactly as he said.

Of course there was a grand wedding. Arthur's influence was sufficient to keep the story out of the papers. The last heard of Madam Sally she was mistress at the Maison Rouge, but the brother—not Nall St. Cyr—was its master. Nall lost his life on that eventful night.

Jack did not attend the wedding.

"You are not in Clayton's class," said Francis Fox; "don't try to force into it," he said. "You are going to London for me in a few days."

Jack went, and safely reached the other side.

One of the first persons he met was Liza, now again posing as "Madam Memphis."

"And coining money, I suppose," Pryor said.

"Arthur provided me with half a million. Send any sincere mourner you please to me, Jack Pryor, and I shall do my best. But no money. It is enough to feel that I am doing my part to aid the nation's head and those who mourn them."

THE SEAL OF JOAN OF ARC

BY EUGENE SHADE BISBEE.

I WAS sitting at a table in front of the Cafe de la Paix, one evening in May a few years since, watching the throng of revelers and sightseers that passed in a steady stream in both directions. I was quite alone in Paris, and with naught on my mind but the full enjoyment of the present, the scene of life and animation had, for my youthful blood, a peculiar charm. It was my maiden visit to the gay capital, and being at last within its walls, I felt, as many of my countrymen, I dare say, do, that life had at last reached its climax and that from now on would be but to descend the path from the clouds onto the prosaic plain below.

As I sat thus, my attention was attracted to a man who dropped into a chair which had just been vacated at my table. He was of such striking personality as to become an object of observation in any place. His tall and muscular figure bore with easy grace the evening clothes in which he was clad, his light coat falling away so as to disclose a small opal scintillating in the midst of a snowy sea; his hair was abundant, jet black and wavy, while the ends of a graceful mustache swept his cheek. He seemed to be waiting for some one, and I was not surprised to see him joined presently by a man and young woman. The latter was very handsomely gowned, and very beautiful withal. No sooner had she been seated than the man who had been her escort left them alone together. I could not have helped hearing their conversation had I tried, but what they may have been talking about was a mystery to me, as they were speaking in Italian, a language with which I was wholly unacquainted. They both presently rose and took their departure, and as they did so I noticed the man drop something, but he had mingled in the crowd before I was able to attract his attention to the object, which I now held in my hand. It was a white envelope and bore no mark or address, but I perceived that it contained an enclosure, so waited to see if the owner would return for it. But he did not come.

A little while after I repaired to my hotel for the night.

After all, I thought, the thing is of no value, and I may as well satisfy my pardonable curiosity. I opened the envelope, and withdrew a closely folded paper, which, in turn, contained another paper. This last was of a dull, dirty yellow color, and seemed to be rather of parchment than paper, but not caring to examine it on the street, I called a fiacre, and was soon at my hotel. Once more I opened it, and this time unfolded the aged-looking piece of parchment. It was about four by six or seven inches in size, and bore a large blue seal in its center, through which had been drawn what appeared to be a human hair. There was some writing in Old French, but my knowledge of the tongue was not sufficient to permit of my deciphering it, and I gave my entire attention to the signature. It seemed to be "John" or "Jane" something, but the chirography was very poor, and I could not determine what the name may have been. The seal was very crude, and bore no

She fell on her knees beside his chair, and held out to him a small casket.

mark other than the peculiarly distinctive one of the hair drawn through it, and the lines of a thumb. I laid the paper down, and took two or three turns across the room, thinking to ease my eyes before again attempting its solution; but in the midst of my walk from table to window, I almost unconsciously glanced again at its yellow surface. The shock I got nearly took me off my feet, for there, staring me in the face, as plain as broad day, was the bold signature "Joan d'Arc," and a date, "14—," the last two figures being illegible, perhaps from the hand of time. The wonder was that I had not seen it before.

Verily, I had come into a valuable possession, if this were a genuine document, even though it were but a portion of the original.

That night I guarded carefully this strange token of a misty past, feeling certain that the morning papers would contain a card proclaiming its loss.

In this, however, I was mistaken, for a thorough search revealed nothing. But even as I sipped my chocolate a waiter approached and handed me a note, which I opened and read:

"Will Mr. Gordon have the goodness to return to 51, Rue Pierre Charron, the small packet dropped by the writer in the Cafe de la Paix last evening? Please inquire for TOMASO LOMBROSI."

"Well!" I ejaculated aloud, and then thought to myself that at any rate the owner of the document was well aware of my name.

How he came by the knowledge was of no moment. I scented an adventure—perhaps a story—in the air, and determined to avail myself of the opportunity it afforded.

With this end in view, I rose from the table and was soon on my way toward the place named in the note, which I soon found to be a house of ordinary appearance, and not far from my hotel. To my ring the door was opened by a footman in livery, who at once inquired if I were "Monsieur Garrdong," to which I replied in the affirmative, whereupon he conducted me into a sort of waiting-room opening off the hall and at once disappeared. I had scarcely time to note more than that my surroundings bore an air of refinement, when a soft footfall smote my ear, and turning, I beheld before me the gentleman whom I had observed at the Cafe de la Paix the evening before. He greeted me cordially—as an old friend—rang for wine and cigars, and at once opened up a conversation in which he made not the slightest mention of the object of my visit. I found in him a man of broad knowledge and much travel, and so easy was his manner, that I readily found myself chatting with him on terms of the utmost familiarity.

Our conversation finally found its way around to the finding of the packet, when Signor Lombrosi, for such was my host, said:

"Mr. Gordon of course realizes that he has made a most important find?"

I assured him that I fancied I had in my possion a legitimate signature of the inspired Maid of Orleans.

"Quite correct, Mr. Gordon; but you have also a portion of a document for which the entire Police Department of France has been searching for a score of years—you hold the only thing which makes valid the title to enormous estates in the north of France, and for which a reward of two hundred thousand francs has been offered. After months of closest application and constant work, I had at last had my efforts rewarded, and was on my way to deliver the lost seal into the proper hands, when I had the misfortune to lose it from my pocket, as you know. You will wonder how I knew your name, but you will understand, when I tell you that secret agents are constantly in my service, and my movements guarded day and night. One of my agents was near at hand when you picked up the paper you hold, and at once followed you and learned your name and business in Paris, after which he informed me of your finding a paper dropped by myself, whereupon I discovered my loss, and the rest was simple. I am generally known as Signor Lombrosi, but my position is that of Chief of Police of Brussels, in which capacity I have served for many years."

I was rather surprised at learning that the gentleman was connected with the police department, since I had pictured him a wealthy man of leisure, given, perhaps, to odd fancies for the collecting of souvenirs, of which the seal I had found was a sample, yet, when hearing his words, I think I evinced no outward indication of surprise.

"Of course Mr. Gordon has brought with him the parchment and seal?" he asked.

I responded that I had done so, and forthwith drew it from my pocket-book and placed it on the table in front of me. Signor Lombrosi took it with a movement of seeming reverence, and closely surveyed the ancient souvenir.

"Yes, it is indeed the same! Ah, Mr. Gordon, words cannot convey to you my happiness at once more finding myself in possession of this treasure for which I have so long sought. It is not paltry gain that inspired me; it is the deep interest I take in my profession, and the feeling of success, that gives me this happiness. Of course I am paid very largely for its recovery, but aside from this, I am at liberty to pay over to you the sum of two hundred thousand francs, the reward which had been offered. The seal was stolen from the archives, and unfortunately the robbers escaped; therefore no reward was due any one but myself, but now that I have been so careless as to lose it, and you so fortunate as to find it, the sum I have named is yours."

"My dear Signor Lombrosi," I cried, "I cannot think of accepting such a sum for my reward" (although its generous proportions dazzled me and excited my natural cupidity even as I spoke). "I have done no work for this money; why should

you expect me to profit by another's misfortune?"

"You indeed speak like the generous man your face proclaims you to be; but reflect, Mr. Gordon —this money comes from the pockets of people who are so well able to afford it that they will never miss it—people who, though wealthy now, would be the veriest paupers were it not for you and me."

I did indeed reflect while he continued speaking in this strain. Two hundred thousand francs! Forty thousand dollars! The sum was large. Why should I deliberately throw away a fortune for a sentiment even if I had plenty of money already? Forty thousand dollars are not found every day. It was thrown in my path by Fate. I would accept its decree, and finally I told him so.

"Now you speak sensibly, Mr. Gordon; you shall have the money at once," said Signor Lombrosi, stepping, as he spoke, toward a handsome old oak desk near the front window of this half-office, half-library. In a moment he rang the bell, and to the man who appeared said: "Francois, take this to the bank and bring me the money."

The door had scarcely closed upon him, when it flew open again, and with a delicious frou-frou of silk that wafted a breath of violets to my nostrils, there entered, with a billowy rush, a most exquisitely beautiful woman, who ran quickly to Lombrosi and fell on her knees beside his chair, laughing in childish delight as she held out to him a small casket, and crying, in French:

"Oh, see, my dear boy; they have come! Are they not beautiful?"

It was quite evident that she was unaware of my presence, for a deep flush overspread her cheek as Lombrosi, placing his hand affectionately on her head, said: "My dear, I have a guest," and she turned and beheld me.

I saw at once that she was the one who had been his companion the night before, and a moment after had been presented to his wife. Her confusion soon vanished, and we all sat looking at the contents of the casket, which had so excited her. It was filled with diamonds, and their fire filtered through the subdued light of the room and threw their radiance into her eyes as these latter danced with delight at the splendid spectacle. There was a collar of seven rows of splendid stones, an armlet, and a dozen or more rings. Suddenly, as if just remembering, she said, changing to a quaint English: "Ah, I did forget the poor man—he is waiting to see you."

"What for?" asked Lombrosi, briefly.

"He would have the money to-day."

"Tell him to come to-morrow," he replied.

"*Mais non*, the poor man cries with distress; he needs the money to pay a note—he say if he fail to pay to-day, his business is ruined. Ah, my dear, you will help the poor man?" she asks, pleadingly.

Lombrosi laughed, and patted the hand that she laid on his arm.

"Of course, my girl; how much do we owe for these trinkets?"

"Three hundred thousand francs," she said, blithely.

His eyes twinkled as he looked at me and said: "Mr. Gordon, wives are expensive toys."

"Ah, but I am not a toy!" she interrupted.

"Yes, my dear; a pretty toy, but one I am very fond of, and I want you to be nothing else. I am quite willing to pay for the privilege of possessing you."

She smiled happily. She was indeed a most exquisite toy. No other description would have fitted her. She was useful only to charm a man's senses and lull him to rest with the melody of her voice, the glance of her eye. She was a fairy-like creature, whose necessities were others' luxuries, and whom the least deprivation would have killed. As we chatted, Francois returned, bringing a small satchel, which he handed to Lombrosi and retired. The latter took from it a bankbook, at which he glanced for a moment, and then his brows contracted as he muttered the single expression:

"Sacre!"

"What is it?" asked madame.

"I cannot pay this man to-day; I have forgotten about paying the rewards in the Berot case, and I find I have but fifty thousand francs in the bank. Here are yours, Mr. Gordon," he ended, coming to me and counting out two hundred thousand francs on the table before me.

"No, my dear signor, I tell you I will not accept them unless you permit me to make you the loan of them for any length of time that may suit you. Let us pay the jeweler."

"Ah, but even should I accept your generous offer, I should still be fifty thousand short—the price of the jewels was three hundred thousand, you know."

I thought for a moment. I could easily advance him the fifty thousand necessary, why not do it? Could I sit there in the presence of that woman and show a parsimonious spirit in the face of such generosity as her husband had exhibited in his dealing with me? Never! I asked the use of his desk, and in a moment had written a check on my bankers for fifty thousand francs, and insisted that he send Francois to have it cashed. Although Lombrosi demurred, his wife seemed so anxious to possess the jewels, that her looks of entreaty, coupled with my words, finally prevailed, and it was not long ere I had the satisfaction of seeing Francois return with the money, which we at once handed to the waiting jeweler.

As I walked toward my hotel, after what I had the pleasure of feeling was a rather noble transaction on my part, I think I had never been happier in my life. I had secured the friendship of a most important and influential man and his most

charming wife, and I had made forty thousand dollars in a single day, and all through the finding of a slip of paper. Considered carefully, it had been an eventful day, and I was supremely satisfied with it and myself. Besides, I was young, and a beautiful woman's gratitude, shown in her smiles, and the pressure of her soft hand had their certain effect.

Nor was the least of my good fortune the cordial invitation to dine en famille with Signor Lombrosi and his wife on the following evening, when, my newly-made friend whispered as we parted, I should receive the whole sum of money due me. I had dismissed this subject as mercenary, and continued on my way with a light heart and a merry whistle on my lips.

Somehow or other the hours slipped by, and I found myself ringing the bell on the Rue Pierre Charron.

A servant came—an old man who stood with the door opened but a crack. I demanded to see Signor Lombrosi, but the old man merely shook his head and slammed the door in my face. Something began to dawn on my brain. I drove to the Prefecture and sought the Chief. I explained my errand by merely asking the name of the Chief of the Brussels Police. The name he gave me was not Lombrosi. Further investigation revealed the fact that "Signor Lombrosi" had rented the house for a week only—that no such name was on the books of the Bank of France—that no jeweler in Paris had sold any diamonds the day before for such a sum as 300,000 francs to any one, much less to any one calling himself Lombrosi. My experience came rather high, but I did not choose to have the world laugh at me, so I held my peace, and am not telling the name of the fellow who found the Seal of Joan of Arc.

THE APPARITIONS OF SOUTER FELL

SOUTER FELL is a mountain about half a mile in height, enclosed on the north and west sides by precipitous rocks, but somewhat more open on the east, and easier of access. At Wilton Hall, within half a mile of this mountain, on a summer's evening, a farmer and his servant, sitting at the door, saw the figure of a man with a dog pursuing some horses along Souter Fell Side, a place so steep that a horse could scarcely travel on it. They appeared to run at an amazing pace till they got out of sight at the lower end of the Fell. On the following morning the farmer and his servant ascended the steep side of the mountain, in full expectation that they should find the man lying dead, being persuaded that the swiftness with which he ran must have killed him; and imagined also that they should pick up some of the shoes which they thought the horses must have lost in galloping at so furious a rate. They were, however, disappointed, as not the least vestige of either man or horses appeared, not so much as the mark of a horse's hoof on the turf, which in this spot was rather soft.

On the 23d of June of the following year, about half-past seven in the evening, the same servant, then residing in Blakehills, at an equal distance from the mountain, being in a field in front of the farmhouse, saw a troop of horsemen riding on Souter Fell Side, in pretty close ranks and at a brisk pace. Having observed them for some time, he called out his young master, who, before the spot was pointed out to him, discovered the aerial troopers; and this short phenomenon was shortly after witnessed by the whole family. The visionary horsemen appeared to come from the lowest part of Souter Fell, and were visible at a place called Knott; they then moved in regular troops along the side of the Fell till they came opposite to Blakehills, when they went over the mountain. Their first, as well as their last appearance, was bounded by the foot of the mountain. Their pace was that of a regular swift walk, and they were seen for upwards of two hours, when darkness intervened. Several troops were seen in succession, and frequently the last, or last but one in the troop, would quit his position, gallop to the front, and then observe the same pace with the others. The same change was visible to all the spectators, and the sight of the phenomenon was not confined to Blakehills, but was witnessed by the inhabitants of the cottages within a mile; it was attested before a magistrate by the two above-cited individuals in the month of July. Twenty-six persons are said in the attestation to have witnessed the march of these aerial travelers.

It should be remarked that these appearances were observed on the eve of the Rebellion, when troops of horsemen might be privately exercising; and as the imitative powers of the Specter of the Broken Mountain demonstrate that the actions of human beings are sometimes pictured in the clouds, it seems highly probably, on a consideration of all the circumstances of this latter phenomenon on Souter Fell, that thin vapors must have hovered round the summit of the mountain when the appearances were observed. It is also probable that these vapors may have been impressed with the shadowy forms which seemed to "imitate humanity" by a particular operation of the sun's rays, united with some singular, but unknown, refractive combinations then taking place in the atmosphere. In other words, it was a mirage.

MEPHISTOPHELES ENTRAPPED

BY KATHERINE C. GIBSON

"BY Jove, that settles it," and handsome Captain Floyd Harcourt, of Her Majesty's Hussars (stationed at the time this story opens at Southampton), rose from his seat and with reckless extravagance threw his freshly lighted cigar into the area of the soldiers' barracks.

"Hello, Harcourt, what's up now?" asked a brother officer, entering the room.

"That you, Harry? Nothing, only I am devilish tired of vegetating here, and as mother writes that Lady Weldon is to give a *bal masque* to-night, I think I'll borrow Barton's Mephistopheles outfit, and if I can get off run up to London this afternoon."

"Deucedly nice little woman, Lady Weldon," drawled Captain Ennis, "and she always has a lot of stunning girls visiting her. Did your mother mention any of the debutants with her now?"

Floyd flushed guiltily, although he merely replied:

"My sister Dora is there," but his thoughts flew back to a certain paragraph in the letter, which ran as follows:

"Miss Emily Wetherill, the American heiress, whose income is estimated at $50,000 a year, is also staying with Lady Weldon. Now, my dear boy, you are to be envied in that Nature has endowed you with more than her ordinary gifts. Take your mother's advice, Floyd, and don't let them go begging, for remember that rich girls want husbands as well as poor ones."

"You see," he continued, aloud, "I will reach there about six this evening, then jump into a hansom with my luggage, drive to the Grosvenor, and I'll be ready for the fray about ten o'clock."

"Couldn't be plainer sailing," agreed Ennis, "but I must be moving—Denton has gone home to be married, and kindly left me all his chores to attend to—beastly shabby, I call it. Well, good-by, old fellow. Good luck, and a ripping time," and the clanking of spurs, accompanied by the slamming of the mess-room door, announced that officer's departure.

Captain Harcourt knocked the ashes thoughtfully from his cigarette, and strolling leisurely out into the area, disappeared.

Three hours later he and his "Gladstone" were comfortably settled in the train, where with a good novel, and his cap drawn down well over his eyes, he prepared to make himself perfectly happy. The beautiful English landscape had no attractions for him whatever, and the buxom, rosy-cheeked farmers' daughters, of whom he caught a fleeting glimpse as the train whizzed past the station, were not even glanced at.

Suddenly, when within half an hour of London, the train came to a standstill, the door of his carriage was flung open, and a woman's voice called out: "Emily, this way, dear. Tell the porter to bring the luggage in here." The captain uttered an ejaculation of disgust, and stared from under his heavy eyebrows at the portly intruder, with anything but a friendly welcome. Just then he heard a quick, light step, and glancing up his eyes encountered those of a slight girl, with a profusion of fluffy blond hair, and dressed in the neatest of Parisian toilettes. The large hazel eyes looked into his own with careless indifference, and the owner proceeded to give her directions to the porter in a brief, business-like manner.

The sweet, but decided mouth, and the unmistakably independent air of the small, slightly *retrouse* nose, seemed to suggest the "land of the free" on the other side of the ocean. In fact, the gallant captain could almost picture to himself the banner of the Stars and Stripes floating above her head. When she turned to her companion, and said, "Well, mamma, I guess he will understand," his suspicions were confirmed, and although he once more buried himself in "Molly Bawn," the book had lost much of its interest for him, and he caught himself stealing furtive glances at his very pretty American neighbor.

Suddenly he caught the name of Lady Weldon, and heard "mamma" say: "Of course, Emily, if you have made up your mind to remain with her ladyship two weeks longer, you may do so, but I shall have to join your father on the continent." What the young lady replied, Harcourt never knew, but it dawned upon him like a flash of lightning that this must be Miss Wetherill, the American heiress, on whose account he was going to London. However, before he could collect his thoughts, after this startling revelation, the train suddenly came to a halt, and in another moment the door of the carriage was jerked violently open, while they were greeted by the dulcet tones of a railroad official bawling:

"Waterloo Station! Hall out 'ere!" Our *beau militaire* was debating whether or not to offer his valuable services to the ladies, but by the time he had composed his little speech of introduction, he found, to his unspeakable amazement, that his fair companions had disappeared, bag and baggage. He bit his lips with vexation, and angrily twirled the ends of his blond mustache as he muttered:

"Blame it, just my luck! But wait until I see her to-night—only a few hours more, and then——"

By this time he had seized his "Gladstone," and

was descending the station steps in search of a cab.

Three-quarters of an hour later he was enjoying a very good dinner at the Grosvenor, and felt decidedly better. His spirits began to rise to such an extent that by the time he had attired himself in his Mephistopheles costume and taken a careful survey of himself in the mirror, he drew a sigh of relief, and felt at peace with the world in general.

At ten o'clock he arrived at Lady Weldon's pretty home in Portland Place, which was brilliantly lighted and thronged with fair Juliettes, picturesque Italian peasants, retiring nuns, gay courtiers of the various centures, and many other distinguished personages. His Satanic Majesty, however, peered anxiously through the crowd, blissfully unconscious of the sensation he was creating, for the effect of his flame-colored costume was striking, to say the least. Suddenly his attention was attracted to a slight, graceful Titania dressed in blue and silver, and as she passed him in the hall, he paused to place her, for there was something unmistakably familiar about the small, fair head which sat so proudly upon a pair of snowy shoulders. He gradually became very much interested, and hurriedly made his way to her side.

"Sweet Titania," he said, "may I have the pleasure of this waltz?"

As a pair of hazel eyes met his own, the gallant captain heaved a sigh of satisfaction and murmured to himself, "Just as I thought—my pretty fellow traveler."

In another moment they were whirling away to the inspiring strains of a San Diego waltz.

Afterwards, as they wandered into the conservatory, he said (enjoying the startled look of surprise with which she regarded him): "Come, Miss Wetherill, let us sit down here and I will bring you an ice. It is so beastly warm in the ballroom."

This commonplace remark seemed to afford her an immense amount of amusement, for she glanced up with a merry laugh and replied:

"Yes, let us rest here by all means, Captain Harcourt, and please remember that strawberry flavoring is my favorite in ices."

Floyd's languid blue eyes opened wide with astonishment, and as he turned on his heel in search of the required refreshment he gave a low, prolonged whistle. "Gad!" he ejaculated, "how in thunder did she know my name? Trust those American girls, though, for finding things out," and he plunged into the crowd, enjoying the prospect of a new flirtation. In the meantime the young lady in question was standing beside a pot of ferns, toying idly with her fan, and apparently absorbed in deep thought. One little blue satin slipper was thrust forward, while the right hand played havoc among the young leaves.

Suddenly she heard her name spoken, and beheld her cavalier in the doorway with an ice.

His eyes lit up with a certain expression of proprietorship, as in a glance he took in the graceful figure, for during the five short minutes of his absence he had pictured in his mind the pleasant flirtation, with its drives and rides (for he intended to get a leave at once), the proposal and acceptance, the announcement of their engagement, then the final trip to the altar, which gave him the fair damsel—and something else besides. Here his train of thought came to a standstill, for the honeymoon didn't count, besides the ice was melting and she might take him to task for his tardiness. She greeted him cordially, however, and made room beside her, an invitation he was prompt to accept.

"Do you know," she said, "I have been wondering how you knew my name."

He leaned toward her, letting his blue eyes rest upon her with the undisguised admiration which women had found so hard to resist, and then replied, lowering his deep voice to a certain tone of tenderness:

"How did I know, Miss Wetherill? Did you think I could travel in your society to-day for three-quarters of an hour, without making some effort to find out your name? I flatter myself that I played the indifferent remarkably well, but upon my word, Miss Wetherill, you may believe it or not, probably not, but I was sorely tempted to waive all ceremony and speak to you. In fact, the blond hair and hazel eyes of my American companion made such an impression on me, that when I learned from your conversation with your mother that you were to be here this evening, I determined to seek you at once and become acquainted. Tell me, do you think me very foolish?"

He leaned back on the sofa, well pleased with himself for having told the truth for once where woman was concerned.

Titania, however, was too busily engaged with the ice to vouchsafe a reply, and although he watched her closely, he was unable to decide whether the impression he had made was favorable or otherwise.

Suddenly a patronizing smile played about the corners of his mouth. She was bashful, poor child, a trait which rather pleased him on the whole, for in all his experience with American girls he had never before found one affiliated with shyness.

This was something novel.

He decided to be very good to her, and permit her to visit her own country twice a year without objecting to the expense. In fact, he would occasionally run over with her for a little change, which they would both need after the usual gay London season.

As he raised his eyes he encountered hers fixed upon him, with an expression which he could not quite fathom.

"Now that I have told you how I knew your name," he said, "suppose you tell me how you knew mine. Turn about is fair play, you know."

She opened and shut her fan restlessly for a few moments, then replied:

"Well, to tell you the truth, Captain Harcourt, I saw your 'Gladstone' marked 'F. S. Harcourt.'"

"Yes," he agreed, "but it didn't enlighten you as to my profession, nor my rank. How did you find them out?"

At this unexpected question she seemed slightly confused, but only for an instant, then she burst into a low, musical laugh.

"Ah," she replied, shaking back a few curls which had escaped from the mask, "that is my secret, which I don't intend to reveal until——"

"Until when?" he asked, somewhat impatiently.

"Until, well, until it suits my convenience," and the hazel eyes shot at him a saucy glance that sent a thrill through his body.

From that time on he did his uttermost to make himself agreeable, and succeeded so well that by the end of the evening Floyd Harcourt, the irresistible, congratulated himself upon an easy conquest, and found to his own amusement that he was very much "epris" of his fair companion.

In the midst of this very interesting tête-à-tête, the signal was given to unmask, and the happy couple joined the other guests in the drawing-room.

Titania raised her fair hands, and untied her mask, then threw her escort a mischievous glance from over her shoulder.

The gallant captain's handsome face assumed an expression of blank amazement, reflecting at the same time the color of his flaming costume.

"Dora," he stammered foolishly. His pretty sister burst into an uncontrollable fit of merry laughter, while in the meantime she gasped between breaths:

"Oh, Floyd, I couldn't resist the temptation. I did intend to tell you when you got me the ice—but, oh, you were so amusing, and it was such fun!"

One can imagine her brother's feelings, particularly as he glanced across the room and was treated to the sight of Miss Wetherill, who made a charming Juliette, by the way, and was deeply engrossed in a conversation with one of her own countrymen.

Captain Floyd Harcourt, of Her Majesty's Hussars, caressed his silken mustache for the space of three minutes, during which he maintained a dignified silence, then turning on his heel, disappeared, and was seen no more that night.

Titania untied her mask, then threw her escort a mischievous glance.

A week later the following paragraph appeared in the *Times:*

"The engagement is announced of Miss Emily Wetherill, the charming American debutant of this season, to Mr. Archibald Terius, the young Chicago millionaire. Mr. Terius is one of the rising young (pork) dealers of America, and it is rumored that the couple have been betrothed for several years, but owing to the extreme youth of Miss Wetherill the affair has been but lately made public. The young people have been the recipients of many congratulations, and it is said that the wedding will take place in the early fall."

A "COLD" DECK OF CARDS

BY CHAS. C. GEDULDIG.

"During the contest over the will of John B. Haskin, today, one of the witnesses gave testimony to show that failure to properly play the game of poker is an evidence of insanity."—New York dispatch in *Providence Journal.*

TWO men are seated at a table in a second-class barroom in New York. One is idly shuffling a deck of cards, while the other is intent upon watching the door. Suddenly he straightens up and whispers something to his companion, who begins dealing the cards, and they both appear deeply interested in their hands, till interrupted by a voice from the bar.

"Come up and take something, Mr. Weatherby! Mr. Simon, come up, sir! It isn't often you'll find me in such good humor. Let me introduce you to my friend here—a friend of my boyhood—Mr. Suggs. Mr. Weatherby, Mr. Suggs; Mr. Simon, Mr. Suggs. I know you'll all be friends, because you're all friends of mine."

Mr. Suggs, who, to all appearance, was a fairly prosperous farmer, shook hands with each in turn in his open, cordial way. "I'm powerful glad to meet you all," he said. "I'm always glad to meet any friends of them as is friends to me. And any man that Sammy Parsons calls friend is good enough for me to 'sociate with, so I'm right honored to make your acquaintance, both of you."

Mr. Weatherby, who was directly in front of Mr. Suggs, bowed in acknowledgment of the rude compliment, but made no comment.

"I met Mr. Suggs by the merest accident this morning," Sammy Parsons explained, "but I knew him instantly. Why, I've sold him many a pound of meat and yard of calico when I used to work for old Peter Grundy, that kept the store at Grundy's Crossings. But how is old Grundy now, Mr. Suggs? I am so delighted to see you that I near forget everybody else."

"Why, old Peter's dead these seven or eight years now," the farmer replied. "His son's been trying to run the store since then, but he ain't the man o' business old Peter was."

"No, that he ain't," admitted Sammy. "Old Peter was peculiar in some things, but he was a first rate business men."

"Yes, yes," Mr. Suggs added slowly. "And old Peter wasn't as bad as some folks said he was. I've known him to do some mighty kind things, and not ask no thanks for it either."

"You're right; so have I," assented Sammy. "Most people didn't know the old man like we, that were near to him."

"I should judge from your conversation that Mr. Suggs is a farmer," ventured Mr. Weatherby.

"Yes, sir; a farmer that does farming right," replied Sammy. "He came in this morning with over a hundred head of hogs, besides a whole load of 'truck' for the markets.

"That always makes me think of my old home," said Mr. Weatherby, in a lower tone. "I was born and raised on the farm, and have never known a real happy day since I left it."

"Then why don't you go back?" suggested Mr. Suggs.

"Ah, I would, Mr. Suggs, but I'm too proud. Not too proud to go back to the old farm, but too proud to return poorer than I left. I was the oldest of the children, and when I came of age it seemed to me the city was the place to make my fortune, so I left with all the money we could rake together there, and came here, and I have never had the courage to go back without having something to give the old man for all his kindness to me."

Mr. Suggs was very much interested, and moved over a little nearer to Weatherby's side. "You needn't wait for that," he said, earnestly; "they'd be just as glad to see you if you didn't have a shirt on your back. Don't stay away because you didn't get rich; mighty few do that, so it ain't no disgrace to fail."

Mr. Weatherby reached over and pressed the farmer's hand tightly. "Your words contain a world of comfort, Mr. Suggs, "although they make me feel homesick. I know that is just how my own father would speak to me."

Mr. Simon here broke in with an invitation to drink. "Let's go back and sit down at a table," he said. "Or better still, we can go to the wine-room where we'll not be disturbed."

They all agreed, and after ordering drinks to be brought back, proceeded to the room in the rear, and seated themselves around a table.

Whether by chance or not, Mr. Suggs occupied the seat across the table from Mr. Simon, with Weatherby on one side and Sammy Parsons on the other.

"We never finished our game, Simon," said Mr. Weatherby.

"Get the cards and finish it!" said Mr. Suggs; "don't let me interrupt your game."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Weatherby returned; "we were only playing 'freeze out' for the drinks."

"Well, finish it anyhow," Mr. Suggs insisted. "I haven't played any cards in a long time, because Mandy is so sot agin 'em, but I like to look on."

Mr. Simon let a broad smile pass over his face at this, which did not escape the old farmer nor lessen his dislike for the city man. The cards were brought as were also a box of chips, and the two proceeded to finish their game.

For a time it went on smoothly, both betting their hands in a reckless fashion that thoroughly excited Mr. Suggs, who was leaning with his elbow on the table watching Weatherby's play. Once, after both had drawn cards, Weatherby offered to bet ten dollars on his, explaining to Mr. Suggs that though he did not gamble often, whenever he got a really good hand he always tried to win something on it, to the sensibility of which Mr. Suggs readily agreed.

Simon studied a few minutes over his hand, and then offered to raise the bet one hundred dollars. Weatherby felt in his pocket, but only had twenty dollars left.

"I hate to have to call down a hand like this to twenty dollars," he said, showing the old farmer four tens, "but you see I haven't got as much money as Simon, and have to work harder for what I have got."

"Here, here!" cried the old man, reaching in his pocket excitedly, "I've got a hundred dollars here and I'll lend you the balance!"

"No, no! Not for the world!" cried Weatherby, hastily laying his hand on the old man's arm. "I couldn't think of risking your money, because I could never pay it back if I lost!"

"But, darn it, you can't lose on that!" he whispered, so loud that all in the room heard.

"No, I do not think I will," Weatherby returned. "If I had the money myself I would not hesitate a moment, but—— Hold! I know what to do to call that bet. You've often tried to buy my horse, Simon. Will you take him as collateral now on this bet?"

"Yes," answered Simon. "Make out a bill of sale for him."

"Here, Sammy! You're a notary public; draw up the bill," Mr. Weatherby commanded, which Sammy forthwith did, being so fortunate as to have several blank forms in his pocket.

"How much is he worth?" Sammy asked, pausing in his writing.

"One hundred and fifty dollars, every cent," replied Weatherby.

"Now, then, Simon," he said, turning to that gentleman, and tossing the bill of sale on the table, "I raise you the other fifty."

Mr. Suggs' eyes fairly glowed as he watched Simon count out the money from a big roll of yellow-backs.

"There it is," said Simon. "Beat my four nines and take it."

"We can just do it!" cried the old farmer, jumping clear out of his seat; "we can beat every one of 'em one shot, by golly!"

Then he caught Weatherby's hand and shook it for two or three minutes without intermission.

"That's the way to bet when you get them," said Weatherby, tearing up the bill of sale; "I always know when the cards will win."

"Aren't you going to give me a chance to win some of it back?" asked Simon, looking anxiously at the pile of money on the table.

"Of course I will! I always do the right thing by a friend," replied Weatherby.

"What's the use of playing for drinks then?" Mr. Simon asked. "Let us all take out twenty dollars' worth of checks and play for money."

"Well, now, I don't know about that," demurred Mr. Suggs; "I promised Mandy—that's my wife, Mandy is—I promised her I wouldn't never play cards for money, 'cause she hates gamblers like p'ison, and Mandy's got a heap o' sinse about knowin' what people ain't good to trust."

"I hope you do not mean to insinuate that I am a gambler!" said Simon, straightening up in his chair. "That is an epithet I do not allow any man to use to me!"

Mr. Weatherby was on his feet in an instant. "Simon, you do Mr. Suggs a grave injustice! He made no reference to you, sir! He was only rightly condemning that class of rogues we all have cause to condemn, and if you choose to take it upon yourself, then the fault be yours; I'll stand by my friend here, because he is certainly in the right."

Mr. Simon rose slowly and extended his hand. "Mr. Suggs, I owe you an apology, sir. I hope you will pardon my hasty words."

"I'll do better still," replied the farmer. "I'll forget all about 'em. No harm's been done, so what's the difference?"

They all agreed with him perfectly and resumed their seats.

"Here's your stack, Simon, here's mine, and here's Weatherby's," said Sammy Parsons, who was counting out the checks. "Mr. Suggs, I am sorry you won't play."

"Who said he wouldn't play?" demanded Weatherby. "You are taking too much upon yourself to presume to answer for him. Give him a stack at once."

Sammy counted out the chips, and Mr. Suggs, without a word, laid down a twenty-dollar gold piece.

"We must play together, and not bet against each other," Weatherby whispered in the farmer's ear. "Simon has got lots of money, and we can win some that way."

Suggs nodded knowingly, and then the game began.

In half an hour Mr. Suggs had won about a hundred dollars, and the cards were still running his way. Another half an hour, and another hundred had been added to his pile.

"I guess I'll have to leave you pretty soon," he said, shifting nervously in his seat. "It's getting late, and I've got fourteen miles to drive to-night."

"To-night nothing," responded Weatherby. "You've got to come home with me to-night. I've got plenty of room, and there'll be a nice supper there waiting for us. A big stable, and plenty of feed for the team; everything you'll need. Fourteen miles, with a heavy load, is a good day's work for any horse, without having to pull it back again."

"Yes, you're right about that; but Mandy——"

"Won't say a word when she hears you've been entertained by friends."

"Is that a fact?"

"Pretty sure of it."

"I don't know," the old man replied, shaking his head dubiously; "Mandy's mighty queer 'bout some things—mighty queer."

"Still she can't offer an objection when she hears how you've been treated. And another thing, I've got a sack of wheat that came direct from Russia—sent to me by my cousin, who lives there. He wants me to plant it and see what it will do here. Now, I've got no way to try it, and if you'll come home with me I'll give it to you."

"Is that a bargain?"

"I mean it."

That settled it. Mr. Suggs promised to stay, and the game proceeded for another half-hour, with about the same results.

Weatherby was shuffling the cards, and had just passed them to Suggs on his right to cut, when Simon called for drinks.

"Let's stop the deal till we get the drinks," suggested Weatherby, at the same time placing the "pack" on the edge of the table between himself and Simon.

The drinks were brought in on a big tray, which was rested on the table first between Sammy Parsons and Mr. Suggs, and then between Weatherby and Simon.

There was something peculiarly significant about this little transaction, but the farmer never noticed it. Could he have seen through the tray, though, his eyes would have opened wide. He would have seen a deck of cards pressed to the bottom by the waiter's fingers; he would have seen the tray resting over the deck on the table; he would have seen the waiter release the one he brought, and take up the other and go out with it; he would have seen the workings of a "cold deck." But he did not see all this, so was unconscious of his danger.

For the benefit of those who may not be conversant with this particular "trick," a word of explanation will not be misplaced.

It consists of a deck identical with that being played with which has been pre-arranged by a confederate on the outside in such a manner that the victim will receive an extraordinarily good hand, while another player receives one just a shade better. It is introduced in various ways—often by some such device as herein explained, and not unfrequently by a player himself. Of all the dirty tricks resorted to by unscrupulous gamblers, the "cold deck" is the dirtiest.

This, then, was the reef against which the unsuspecting old man was to be wrecked.

Mr. Weatherby picked up the cards and dealt the hands around. Simon held the ace, which made it Sammy's first "say." He passed out. Mr. Suggs, of course, stayed, as did Weatherby. Simon raised the draw ten dollars, and Mr. Suggs on his three queens raised him back twenty. Weatherby dropped out, and Simon just stood the raise.

Cards were dealt. Suggs took two, and Simon three. The old farmer trembled in every limb and fiber as he picked up the fourth queen, and met Simon's bet with a cool hundred better.

Simon mumbled something about bluffing, and raised back two hundred. Suggs was all excitement, and eagerly met the raise, elevating it in turn to the extent of all he had.

"There, darn you, you'll either have to call that or lay down!" he cried.

Simon looked worried, which the old farmer did not fail to notice with secret exultation. He scratched his head perplexedly a few seconds, and then quietly laid his hand down and reached in his pocket.

"I oughtn't do this," he murmured; "but here goes! Here's ten thousand dollars I got from the bank this morning to meet a note; but the note will have to wait. I raise you that!"

Mr. Suggs' chin dropped perceptibly at this, and he looked appealingly to Weatherby for advice.

"I ain't got that much," he whispered; "but, gosh, I believe I could beat him if I had!"

Weatherby looked at his cards. "Beat him! Of course you can beat him!" he cried.

"But I ain't got nothing to call him with," persisted the old man.

"You've got your team," suggested Weatherby; "that's worth two or three hundred dollars, and I'll lend you my horse, which is a hundred and fifty more."

Mr. Suggs looked at the other two players. "Will you excuse us for a minute?" he asked. "I want to say something to him privately."

Both readily consented, and Mr. Suggs and Weatherby withdrew to the farthest corner of the room. In a few minutes they returned and resumed their seats.

"Sammy," said Mr. Suggs, very gravely, "I saw you do that trick for Mr. Weatherby a while ago; try your hand again and make me out a bill-o'-sale for the old farm at Grundy's Crossings."

Sammy had his blanks out in a moment and drew up the bill. "How much is it worth now?" he asked.

"About four——"

"It's worth ten thousand dollars, every cent!" interrupted Weatherby; "so put it down at that!"

Still the honest old man hesitated. "It ain't worth quite that much," he said; "not quite, but——"

"Well, you can throw in the team and wagon, that'll about square it," said Simon. "A few dollars won't matter."

Mr. Suggs gave in to this, and the bill was made out and signed, and put in the pool against the roll of money.

"That's all I've got," said Simon. "You needn't raise it any more."

"I ain't goin' to," replied the other, nervously. "Here's my hand. Can you beat it?"

Simon gave a quick glance at it, and then laid his own down before the farmer. It contained four kings.

Mr. Suggs' eyes bulged from his head as he realized now, too late, the gravity of his error.

"Oh, heavens!" he gasped; "what'll Mandy and the children do now the old farm's gone?—and I ain't able ever to get another!"

He staggered up from his seat, and found himself and Weatherby alone. "Don't take it so hard, old man," said Weatherby, with a touch of real kindness in his voice. "Come home with me and we may arrange some way to buy it back."

"Can't never do that," moaned the old man. "It's gone now, and it's gone for good. Mandy was right—she's always right. She told me not to play cards for money, and here I've done it. Well, the good Lord help us."

Weatherby led him out and down the street several blocks. "Wait here till I step in and get some meat," he said, as they paused in front of a store. Mr. Suggs waited. The minute grew into ten, then twenty, and finally half an hour had passed, and not till then did he discover the real truth—that he had been swindled and turned adrift.

Night was falling, but he cared little for that; he got his team from the stable and started sorrowfully home—to the home that perhaps should be but his a short time yet.

"Boys," said Mr. Weatherby to his companions some two hours later, when they met to divide the spoils, "boys, have I ever lied to you?"

"No," they both answered simultaneously.

"Would you trust me now?"

"Certainly."

"If I borrowed something from you and pledged my word to return it at a certain time, would you be satisfied?"

"Why, sure. But why do you ask these questions?"

"I just wanted to be sure," replied Weatherby. "I need money badly, and know of no way to raise it unless you will let me have all of this and trust to my honor to pay you back. There is much more at stake than the mere money consideration, but I cannot explain it to you now, though I may some time in the near future. Will you let me have it on my note?"

Simon, by way of reply, shoved the money and bill-of-sale over to him. Weatherby put it in his pocket, thanked them, and went out.

A heavy rain caught Mr. Suggs on his way home, and caused him to stop over with a friend on the road till near morning, so when he did arrive it was all of eight o'clock. He drew up in front of the house and entered the door with a heavy heart, dreading the interview that lay before him. His wife met him in the little hall and stopped him there.

"What have you been doing, Hiram Suggs?" she demanded.

"Mandy, I'm the darndest fool that ever rid a wagon," he replied meekly.

"Don't tell me what I already know!" she snapped; "where you been?"

"Mandy, I've played the devil," he said, in the same meek tone.

"Don't be givin' me none o' your evasive answers," she retorted. "Tell me what you been doin'!"

"I can't, Mandy; it's too awful."

"You'd better!" she returned threateningly. "You've been into something you hadn't ought to been, and now you're scared to tell it. Ain't that so?"

"Yes, Mandy, that's so."

"I knew it; and it's something dreadful, too. If it wasn't, what would that man want riding up here in all that rain last night? And why would you be so scared to tell it? Something is wrong with you, Hiram Suggs."

"What did that man want last night?" Mr. Suggs questioned, looking up from the corners of his eyes.

"He left a letter to give to you as soon as you came," Mrs. Suggs replied, sharply. "Now, who was that man, and what have you had to do with him?"

"I do not know, Mandy."

"I don't believe you."

"Where's the letter?" he interrupted. "Lemme see that first."

Mandy led the way into the main room and took a large sealed envelope from the mantel and dropped it on the table. "Feels like there's money in it," she remarked. "Better see!"

Mr. Suggs tore it open with nervous fingers and emptied the contents on the table, which consisted of several gold pieces and a number of bills, together with two folded papers. The first he opened was the identical bill-of-sale for the little farm that he lost the day previous, while the other proved to be a short note written in lead pencil,

It ran:

"My Dear Mr. Suggs:—It will hardly be necessary to tell you how you have been swindled, as doubtless you have guessed it before now. Still I add the proof.

"The party of friends you played with were professional gamblers. Sammy Parsons was not the same Sammy you used to know, and I never lived on a farm in my life. You were fooled. I explain this to you to guard you against next time.

"I return your money and bill. When you spoke of your wife and children I could read your heart, and I saw what a crime we had committed. The power of remorse is great. Do not think too harshly of what I did, and remember the reparation I tried to make.

"I am, my dear sir, as you knew me, Weatherby."

Mr. Suggs read this over twice, and then laid it down on the table with an expression of reverence on his face.

"Mandy," he said, very solemnly, "gamblers have got hearts after all."

THE CROYDEN CASE

A Detective Serial

BY POLICE CAPTAIN HOWARD

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND SON.

FOR hours Madge Babbington lay unconscious under the seat in the chapel, showing no signs of life. The doors were opened for service by a hired man fully an hour before the congregation would commence to assemble. The first person to enter the sanctuary after the man had opened the door was William Rupel. He walked slowly up the aisle, knelt before the altar, and bowed his head on the chancel-rail. He prayed long and fervently, and when he raised his face a smile of contentment shone upon it.

As William stood up before the altar he clasped his hands in front of him and raised his eyes to one of the stained-glass windows on which was painted the parable of the Good Samaritan.

"Such is the way all men should live," he murmured, "and yet how many thousands and thousands daily play the part of the priest who passed by on the other side! If this world were only free of the Shylocks of life, what a paradise it would be! But men will be harsh and cruel, and the more money they have the more cruel and grinding they seem to be. With them poverty is a crime. Such was the case with my father. He did not know what pity was. Oh, that I might have the power and wealth of Crœsus, that I might help to relieve some of this suffering which surrounds us."

These were earnest and heartfelt words, and when Rupel had finished he walked slowly down the aisle toward the door. He reached the last row of pews, when he stopped, turned around, and gazed again upon the window which seemed to rivet his attention that morning, and to bring such yearning thoughts into his mind.

"What a heavenly look that face has," he thought, "and what a noble act that traveler is performing!"

At this moment a groan came from the pew by which William Rupel was standing, and he started and looked around the chapel to see from whence the sound proceeded; another groan followed, and this time his eyes rested on the form of a woman lying under the pew. In a moment he stepped forward and lifted Madge Babbington out of her cramped position, placed her on a pew for a minute until he could place some cushions on the floor, when he laid her gently upon them, and then commenced to try and bring her back to consciousness. It was some distance from the chapel to the hall, and William Rupel was afraid to leave the sufferer, lest in his absence she should die. He went into the robing-room and there found some wine, which he poured into a cup, and then gave it to her to drink. This seemed to revive the sufferer, for in a few minutes she opened her eyes and looked into the face of the man who was bending over her and said:

"Where am I?"

"In the chapel of Croyden Abbey," answered William Rupel, as he bathed her head.

She closed her eyes and went off into another fainting fit. Little did William Rupel think that the woman he was trying to restore to consciousness was his own mother. He thought at that moment that she was some poor creature who had wandered into the chapel and had been overcome by hunger and fatigue. As soon as Madge fainted again William Rupel gave her some more of the wine. She breathed heavily. It seemed as if she could hardly get her breath. William Rupel noticed this, and hastily undid the collar of her dress. As he unbuttoned her waist and bared the neck, a locket attracted his attention. It was made of massive gold, and hung around the woman's neck attached to a heavy chain. This had been closely concealed in Madge Babbington's bosom, and no one who had ever known her knew that she possessed such a costly piece of jewelry. William Rupel lifted the locket in his hand and then turned it over on the opposite side. As he did this his eyes rested on something which made him start in surprise and exclaim:

"What can this be? Here is the Croyden arms engraven on this locket, together with the motto of our house."

Still greater was his surprise when, on opening it, he saw before him his father's picture, taken when he was a young man, and in the other side of the case the portrait of the woman before him. He recognized the features immediately.

"This must be the strange woman who visited my father last night, and yet I don't see how that can be, for the valet said that that woman could not speak, while this person can." He still kept on bathing Madge Babbington's head, and administering the wine in small quantities, when at last his efforts were rewarded by her opening her eyes. For a long time Madge Babbington gazed vacantly around the chapel and did not speak. She then covered her face with her hands and muttered:

"I remember it all now."

"Remember what, my good woman?" asked William Rupel, his whole manner showing kindness and sympathy towards the sufferer.

"The fire—my escape—Sir Robert Rupel's death!"

"What do you know about it?" gasped William Rupel in astonishment.

"I was there—we were shut in the apartment and could not escape. Sir Robert was in such a condition that he blew his brains out. The fire surrounded us on all sides. I rushed towards the door leading into the art gallery, hoping to escape through that, when I was appalled by the discovery that that room was ablaze also. Slowly the fire crept towards me. I was almost crazy with the thought that I would be burned alive, when suddenly I remembered that there used to be a secret passage leading from the study to the vaults. I succeeded in finding the spring just as the flames were about to envelop me. I sprang into the passage, closed the door after me, and at last knew that I was safe. I wandered along the passage till I came to the vault under the altar, when I succeeded in getting in here. After this I remembered nothing."

"What is your name, my good woman?" asked William Rupel, after she had finished.

"Madge Babbington."

"Did you know my father?"

"Your father!" exclaimed Madge Babbington, the minute after William Rupel asked the question, and then with all the strength that she could collect, she sat up and looked searchingly into her questioner's eyes. "Know your father!" She now clutched William Rupel's arm, and asked, excitedly:

She sat up and clutched his arm, saying, "Are you Clarence or William Rupel?"

"Tell me, quick, are you Clarence or William Rupel?"

"William Rupel! Why do you ask?"

"William, my—no, no, no, I must not call you that now, and still the revelation must come sooner or later," Madge Babbington cried, as she wrung her hands. She was in the act of throwing her arms around William Rupel's neck, when she commanded her feelings with an effort and again became calm and collected.

This action on Madge Babbington's part surprised William so that he murmured in a low tone:

"Can this woman be crazy?"

It was not so low but what Madge Babbington was able to hear it, and immediately she answered in an aggrieved tone:

"William Rupel, I am not crazy, although my actions a few minutes ago might seem to you that I am."

Madge had hardly uttered these words when she fainted again. The excitement of the discovery had been too great for her. The people now commenced to come into the chapel, and William Rupel was now able to get some assistance. He had Madge Babbington taken to the hall and placed in a room on the second floor, when he sent for a physician, and gave orders that she was to receive the best of care and anything else that she desired. As he walked back to the chapel to attend the service it seemed as if he was troubled greatly about something, and that something was the locket and the woman's strange actions.

"I wonder who she can be?" he thought. "There is some mystery surrounding her life, and there are no doubts but what she was connected with my father in some way. She seems to be acquainted with everything about the abbey. She acted strange when I told her my name. Perhaps she is some poor woman whom my father wronged. I must try and get her to tell me the story of her life, and if I find out that she has suffered through any action of my father, I will try and repair the injury by making her comfortable for life."

He entered the chapel and walked slowly to

the family pew. This morning as he entered it was deserted, and he was the only occupant. His stepmother and Clarence were absent. When the service was over he waited for the curate, and then walked with him back to the abbey.

The curate was a young man, and from the manner in which William talked with him it was easily seen that they were close friends.

"Well, Will," said the curate, as they walked along, "now that your father is dead, and the estates and title are yours, I hope that you will not become hard-hearted and change your course of life in any way."

"If I should think for an instant, Frank, that I would ever become like my father, so cold and heartless, I would renounce my wealth, and either kill myself or go into a monastery," answered William, with considerable animation.

"I am glad to see that you are so determined," answered the curate, "and I pray that you may have the health and strength to carry out the noble work that you have begun. As long as you do this, Will, you need have nothing to fear."

"Thank you, Frank," said Rupel, and he and the curate entered the abbey together.

The Reverend Frank Hoffman was the curate of Croyden. He was a man of the same age as William Rupel, and one having a great deal of force of character. He had made the acquaintance of William at college, and a close friendship sprang up between the two, and when they each entered upon their different courses of life this friendship remained unbroken. Mr. Hoffman entered the church, and soon after he was ordained the curate of Croyden died, and William persuaded his father to give his friend the position. This was done, and Mr. Hoffman became an inmate of Croyden Abbey, and the tie between him and the young politician became closer and closer, until William never undertook anything of importance, unless he asked the curate's advice. It may be said that it was owing to Mr. Hoffman's influence over William that his character had been so beautifully molded.

"Frank, will you have a few minutes to spare this afternoon?" asked William, when he was about to leave the curate at his room-door before he went in to dress for dinner. "I want to talk to you about something that bothers me."

"I can give you all the time you want after dinner," answered the curate, and then the two friends separated, Mr. Hoffman going into his room and William going to the room where Madge Babbington was, to find out how she was.

In the hall he met the doctor, who said, when he saw him:

"I was just going to try and find you. The woman requested me to tell you that she wanted to see you."

"Is she any better, doctor?" asked William, as he stood in front of the door of the room where Madge Babbington was.

"She has received a severe shock to her nervous system. Her heart is affected, and at present I cannot say whether she will live or die. She is very low," answered the doctor.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Is her mind in any way affected?"

"No, it is perfectly clear. The woman has seen a great deal of trouble, and this has broken down her constitution. She is not a common person by any means, and from her conversation I should judge that she had seen better days. When you talk with her be careful that you don't say anything to excite her."

"I'll be careful," answered William, as he bade the doctor good-by, and then went into the room. Madge Babbington had her eyes closed as he entered; but she opened them as soon as he came up to the side of the bed, and said:

"Sir William, will you kindly tell the maid to leave the room for a little while, as I want to talk to you privately."

William did as she requested, wondering what she could want to see him for privately. Her voice was calm and collected, and she did not show any signs of being agitated or excited. When the servant had left the room and Madge Babbington was left alone with William, she said:

"I heard the doctor say a little while ago that he could not say whether I would live or die, and so I sent for you to tell you something that I wish it was not left to me to disclose. It is for your benefit, Sir William, and I want you to promise me that after I have told you everything you will not upbraid me for what I have done. Will you promise me that?"

"I will."

A silence followed this, and both mother and son looked searchingly at each other—the one yearning to throw herself in the arms of her child, and the other unconscious of the relationship, and wondering what it was that was about to be revealed to him.

"Sir William, sit down by my side and take my hand," said Madge Babbington. "I have a strange and sad story to relate, and I want to hold your hand to give me courage to do it."

"Anything I can do for you I will do it," answered William.

"If your father had listened to me last night there would be no need for this pain that I am about to cause you."

"What can the woman mean?" thought William, as Madge Babbington stopped for a few minutes to get her breath.

"You no doubt would have learned of this later on in life, and it would have ruined you, but, thank heaven, I have lived longer than your father, and am able to save you from this disgrace——"

"Disgrace!" ejaculated William, at a loss to understand what Madge could mean.

"Yes, William"—this time she did not use the Sir—"if your father had lived and I had not been able to do anything with him, you would

have been disgraced at his death. The fire last night was a Godsend; it destroyed all proofs of your father's crimes and left you without a stain on your character. But you must act speedily and obey me, or the partial victory that I have gained will be useless to you."

By this time Rupel was greatly excited, and he exclaimed:

"Come, woman, I am getting tired of this enigmatical way of speaking; tell me plainly what all these curious riddles mean——"

Madge placed her hand on her breast; there were tears in her eyes, and a great lump seemed to rise in her throat so that she could hardly speak. She tried to control her voice, but so great was her emotion that it quivered as she said:

"William, it means that you are Sir Robert Rupel's illegitimate child; that you have no claim to the title which your father has left, and that I, Madge Babbington, a sinful and degraded wretch of a woman, am your mother."

"I'll not believe it," cried William. He darted from his mother's bed as if she had been a viper, and had stung him.

"It is so, all the same," moaned the miserable woman, "and you would have heard of it from other lips besides mine. The world would have pointed to you with scorn, and all the greatness or popularity which you have gained would not save you from the brand of illegitimacy."

"Oh, this is fearful!" cried Rupel, as he put his hands to his head. "Am I dreaming? Did I hear aright? Can this revelation be true, or is this only the hallucination of a madwoman? What does my greatness amount to? Oh, that I might die! Why do I go on so? It can't be so; and yet, suppose it is true, what will the world say? Oh, the thought is killing! If I am the illegitimate prodigy of Sir Rupel I will blow my brains out!"

"My son, don't talk that way," sobbed Madge. "Look at your poor old mother, and think of what she must suffer. I am here to devise some means to save you from the disgrace which you fear so much. The world knows nothing of this, and it never will if you will act promptly."

"What would you have me do?" asked William as he became more calm, and stood with his arms folded before his mother's bed.

"Listen to me and mark what I say well," she said, and then went on to relate to him all that took place in the study the evening before, what his father's plans had been, how the will had been burned, and finally ended by saying: "Now all that you have to do is to produce my certificate of marriage, place that marriage on the parish register, get certificates of your birth and my death, and find a new will."

"Then, woman, you would have me commit a crime to cover up the offenses of my parents? You would have me commit a forgery to save my name from obloquy. I'll not do it; I'll bear the shame, and allow Clarence and *his* mother to claim the estates, which is by law theirs."

"Theirs by law—true, true," exclaimed his mother, "but not theirs by right. It is justly yours. You are Sir Robert's eldest son, and it was your father's base crimes that would have deprived you of your rights. Listen to reason, William. The world knows nothing of this yet—you are safe. Suppose you make it known, what will be the result? Your popularity will fade away; your constituents will sneer at you; the people whom you yearn so much to help will lose a great benefactor; listen to reason, I beseech of you." She frantically arose from her bed, and knelt on the floor at her son's feet, frantically clutching his knees with her hands; then when she found that he was silent, she continued more passionately:

"William, do listen to your mother—the woman who loves you and would give up her life to save you. Do say that you will act as I want you to—Clarence and Lady Anne Rupel hate you and will be only too glad to grasp this prize from your hands. With this wealth and this title think of what good you can do. You will succeed, you will become great, you will work for the benefit of the poor and down-trodden. What if you allow this to go into Clarence's hands? He is a spendthrift and a gambler, and if he gets the estate he will only squander it. Think of this, William. Don't look with such scorn upon your poor old mother; she loves you, even though she was never able to do a mother's part by you. Say you will forgive this miserable wretch at your feet, and that you will save yourself from disgrace. My son, dear William, do say yes."

This earnest appeal seemed to be working on Rupel's feelings. Tears shone in his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. He had thought of all that his mother was saying, and when she had finished he bent down, lifted her from her knees, clasped her in his arms, and exclaimed:

"Mother, I will do it."

That one sentence seemed to put new life into Madge Babbington, and when he uttered the word mother, it sounded like heavenly music in her ears. Her weakness had all passed away now, and she stood firmly on her feet. She took her son's hands in her own and pressed them to her lips. William Rupel would not submit to this show of slavery. His sympathetic heart was full of compassion; he drew his hands away quickly, lifted his mother's face and kissed her on the forehead.

"Mother, forgive me for the harshness that I have just used towards you. I will do as you say."

"William, it is I that should ask forgiveness."

"Let us hear no more of this now. We must be cautious how we act, and no one must know of the relationship between us. I must leave you now. I will come back and see you after dinner, when we will talk over this matter."

Madge returned to her bed, and after Rupel left the room her condition seemed to be improved

greatly. William went to his own room and sat down by his desk, bowing his head upon his arms. For a long time he remained in this position, and was only aroused by the entrance of his valet, who announced that dinner was ready. He made his toilet in a hurry, and joined the rest of the family, who were waiting for him. Lady Ann was sitting at the table when he came in, and her son Clarence was sitting on the opposite side from her. William entered the dining-room and took his place at the table without saying a word to any one. This was something unusual, for he was always noted for his jovial remarks, but now as his friend, the Rev. Frank Hoffman, looked at him he saw that he looked haggard, and that there was something on his mind. All through the meal he was silent, and tasted but little of the food that was placed before him, and as soon as it was over he arose in haste from his seat and was hurrying away, when Mr. Hoffman arrested him by placing his hand on his shoulder, and saying in an affective manner:

"Will, what is the matter? Shall we go to my room and talk over that business you said you desired to consult me about?"

"There is nothing the matter now, Frank," answered William with some hesitancy. "I will not need to take up your time, for I have found out all I desire to know. I have some letters to write and will now go to my room."

"Come, Will, I know that something worries you; tell me, and if I can help you in any way I will gladly do so," said the curate.

"Nothing worries me, Frank. I am pressed with business cares, that is all."

"Is it financial matters?"

"No, no. I am not embarrassed in any way."

"Has Clarence got into another scrape?"

"Not that I know of. I'm all right; don't ask me anything more. The only thing the matter with me is that I cannot get rid of the thought of my father's horrible death."

This excuse seemed to satisfy Mr. Hoffman, for he left William, and went out intending to pay a visit to the village, which he would have put off if he could have done anything to have helped his friend. What would he have said if he had known what that friend was about to do? For some time William Rupel stood looking after his friend until he was out of sight; he then turned and entered the room where his mother was. He murmured:

"Ah, Frank, if you only knew what was bothering me, and the crime that I am about to commit, you would turn away in disgust—all your love and friendship would be turned to loathing. But then I am doing something that will save you and all my friends from disgrace; there is some consolation in that. I am perfectly safe and it will never be found out."

So have thought hundreds of others before, besides William Rupel. On that Sunday if he had known what would be the results of his yielding to his mother's wishes, he would have tried to have saved himself from the stigma of his parent's crime in some other and more honorable way.

(To be continued)

THE MUSICAL PIGEON

RELATED BY MRS. PIOZZI

"AN odd thing to which I was this morning witness has called my thoughts away to a curious train of reflections upon the animal race, and how far they may be made companionable and intelligent. The famous Ferdinand Bertoni, so well known in London by his long residence among us, and from the undisputed merit of his compositions, now inhabits this, his native city, and being fond of dumb creatures, as we call them, took to petting a pigeon, one of the few animals that can live at Venice, where, as I observed, scarcely any quadrupeds can be admitted, or would exist with any degree of comfort to themselves. This creature has, however, by keeping his master company, I trust, obtained so perfect an ear and taste for music that no one who sees his behavior can doubt for a moment of the pleasure he takes in hearing Mr. Bertoni play and sing; for as soon as he sits down to the instrument Columbo begins shaking his wings, perches on the piano-forte and expresses the most indubitable emotions of delight. If, however, he or any one else strike a note false, or make any discord upon the keys the dove never fails to show evident tokens of anger and distress, and if teased too long, grows quite enraged, pecking the offender's legs and fingers in such a manner as to leave nothing less doubtful than the sincerity of his resentment. Signora Cecilia Giuliani, a scholar of Bertoni's, who has received some overtures from the London Theater lately, will, if she ever arrives there, bear testimony to the truth of an assertion very difficult to believe, and to which I should hardly myself give credit were I not witness to it every morning that I chose to call and confirm my own belief. A friend present protested he should feel afraid to touch the piano before so nice a critic, and though we all laughed at the assertion, Bertoni declared he never knew the bird's judgment fail, and that he often kept him out of the room for fear of affronting or tormenting those who came to take musical instructions. With regard to other actions of life I saw nothing particularly in the pigeon but his tameness and strong attachment to his master, for though never winged, and only clipped a very little, he never seeks to range away from the house or quit his master's service any more than the dove of Anacreon."

CURRENT NEWS

FISH IN BLOCK OF ICE

A squaw fish, embedded in a 100-pound block of ice, was exhibited in the window of a hotel in Thompson Falls, Mont., recently. Apparently the fish was in the act of swimming to the surface when it struck the congealed water. Some say the fish is still alive and will revive when the ice is thawed, while others believe it is dead.

CANNON-BALL IN A TREE

While cutting down a tree on a farm near Blue Springs, Mo., Noah Russell and William Brown found a cannon-ball embedded in the trunk. It had apparently penetrated the trunk of the tree during the Civil War battle near Blue Springs and had whitened with age. The tree, which died about two years ago, had completely covered the cannon-ball and all evidence of its entrance.

LABRADOR PENINSULA SUCCESSFULLY CROSSED

The peninsula of Labrador has been crossed from the south to the north, Dr. W. J. Holland, director of the Carnegie Museum, announced, on receipt of a telegram from St. Johns, Newfoundland. It told of the safe arrival at that point of the expedition which last April started from the Bay of Seven Islands on the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Ungava on Davis's Strait.

MINT 10,000,000 CENTS BEHIND

So extraordinary is the demand for pennies that the United States Mint, Philadelphia, Pa., despite the fact that it is working twenty-four hours a day, is unable to keep up with the demand. The superintendent said the institution is 10,000,000 pennies behind in its orders. An average of 1,500,000 pennies is coined each day. The war tax and the annual heavy demand for Christmas will increase the need of pennies.

FIREMEN HELD AS THIEVES

Eight city firemen of Chicago, Ill., alleged to be involved in a series of safe robberies, are under arrest to-day on orders from State's Attorney Hoyne. It is said that the plan was for the firemen, whose uniforms gave them easy access, to get advance information on pretense of looking for violations of fire ordinances, and then blow the safes themselves, or communicate the information to others.

MEDAL TO ORVILLE WRIGHT

Orville Wright, who, with his brother, invented the airplane, was honored recently by Lord Northcliffe, head of the British War Mission to the United States, who decorated him with the Albert Medal.

The medal was presented by the Royal Society of Arts of England, which awards a medal each year to some one prominent in the arts and sciences. Lord Northcliffe, a director in the society, was designated to make the presentation.

VAST DESTROYER PROGRAMS

Conditions in the present war are changing so rapidly that naval policy has to be very alert and elastic. Secretary Daniels has shown that he is keeping in close touch with developments; and the latest evidence of this is his adoption and earnest support of the proposal to build a large destroyer fleet, additional to the one we already possess. He recommends the expenditure of $350,000,000 for the construction of destroyers and the erection of new yards or the enlargement of existing yards to provide additional facilities for building these most useful craft. Plans have been prepared for a standardized type, and, if the appropriation asked for is granted, it should be possible to lay down from 250 to 300 destroyers within the year. The boats we have sent to the other side have done excellent work.

A VAST DEPOSIT OF ASPHALT

The vastest deposit of asphalt in the world, hitherto untouched, is about to be opened up. This is in Northwestern Canada, its southern boundary being about 300 miles north of Edmonton. The area, according to the Scientific American, is, probably, not less than one thousand square miles, and the average thickness is upward of 100 feet. The railroad from Edmonton, begun two years ago, is now almost completed, and it will be possible to get this asphalt out. Its form is a sand containing 15 per cent bitumen. At the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research in Pittsburgh a process for separating the asphalt from the sand has been developed.

All this is now on Canadian Government property, but it is expected that it will be opened for commercial exploitation.

FIGHTING THE GOPHER PEST IN SASKATCHEWAN

After struggling for a long time in an unsystematic way with the gopher problem, the province of Saskatchewan this year set aside May 1st as "Gopher Day," and enlisted the school children of the province in a competition to see who could destroy the largest number of gophers up to the evening of that day. The authorities offered 36 bronze shields and 36 bronze medals as prizes for schools and individual children, respectively. A silver shield was offered to the school, and a gold watch to the pupil making the highest records in the whole province. The best school record was 7,632 gophers, while the gold watch was won by a boy who had 2,092 victims to his credit. A total of 514,410 gophers were destroyed, and the resulting benefit to the crops is estimated at $200,000. A permanent gopher-killing league has now been organized among the school children.

OLDEST IRON SHIP WRECKED.

News from New Zealand was received recently that the oldest iron steamship in the world, the *Stormbird*, had gone ashore on the rocks at Wanganui and broken in two. The *Stormbird* was built in 1854 at Glasgow, and had been employed in Australian and New Zealand waters for more than sixty-two years.

GERMAN OFFICER SHOT TO DEATH BY HIS MEN

Percy Robinson, in a despatch to the *Daily News*, mentions the following significant incident in illustration of his statement that the morale and discipline of the German troops are now very bad.

When an officer commanding the Cameronians went into a redoubt in his neighborhood he found the German officer who was in command lying on the floor, his hands bound behind him. He had been shot to death by his own men.

MARRIED IN DUGOUT

A military wedding took place the other evening at the home of Mrs. Gertrude H. Woodward, 1848 Morgan place, Los Angeles, Cal., when Miss Dorothy V. Pearce became the bride of Sergt. James G. Caplinger of the Sixth Company, California Coast Artillery.

A trench dugout was the "church," while the altar was the rough washstand of the soldier, minus the wash basin, soap and towels.

The ceremony was performed by Chaplain Griffith of the Coast Artillery, in the presence of only a few friends of the couple. Corp. E. H. Morrison acted as best man.

WHY THE HAIR STANDS ON END.

The hair does stand on end under certain conditions, because there is a little muscle down at the root of each hair that will make each hair stand up straight when this muscle pulls a certain way. It is difficult to say just how these muscles are caused to act in this way when we are frightened. We know that when thoroughly frightened our hair will sometimes stand straight up, and we know that it is this muscle at the root of each hair that makes it possible, says the *Book of Wonders*, but why it is that a big scare will make this muscle act this way we do not as yet know.

TESTAMENT SAVED HIS LIFE.

Seven times wounded, and three times in the hospital, the last time saved from a fatal shot in his heart by a Testament carried in the pocket of his tunic, is the record of Eugene Defail, French soldier of the 152d Infantry, Seventh Corps.

He was carrying the Testament in Alsace on January 10 of this year, when a machine-gun bullet buried itself in his Testament. Three other bullets, not fatal, put him out of action. The Testament is on exhibition in the salesrooms of the American Bible Society in Astor place, Manhattan, along with the new khaki-bound editions prepared for American soldiers.

UNCLE SAM ISSUES HIS WAR SONG BOOK

Uncle Sam published his first official song book and placed it on the market October 30. On the cover are inscribed his initials "U. S.," and the book is entitled "Songs of the Soldiers and Sailors." It is issued by the Committees on Training Camp Activities of the Army and Navy Departments, and will sell on the book stands for 25 cents a copy. To those in the service it will be sold at cost—15 cents.

The book contains sixty-nine songs, including all the American patriotic and battle airs, the Hawaiian hulas and the sacred songs usually sung in choruses. An appendix has eighty other songs that may be sung.

There are now nineteen chorus instructors in the army and six in the navy camps.

FIND $10,000 IN HOUSE.

Ten thousand dollars saved by Mr. and Mrs. Johanna Radell during their life-time was found at Moberly, Mo., in the family residence recently by Public Administrator J. Frank Holman. Mr. Holman was called in to take charge of the estate of Mrs. Radell, an elderly woman who dropped dead. He summoned three assistants, and with them made a search of the house.

Secreted in an old cabinet in a pin-cushion the searchers found $2,000, and locked in an iron-bound trunk the men found $7,150 hidden in a flour sack. The administrator believes more money is about the premises.

The Radells never made a deposit at a bank. They paid their debts in currency. Mr. Radell owned a bakery, which Mrs. Radell was running at the time of her death. No children survive the couple, and only distant relatives can be found.

LIVED IN SMALL ROOM, HAD $20,000 IN BANKS

For twelve years Michael Kenney, once a Brooklyn water inspector, lived in a small furnished room at 2789 Morris avenue, the Bronx, New York. He seldom spoke to any one, and when he was accidentally asphyxiated by gas last Wednesday the police had no way of ascertaining whether he had any relatives.

It was known he owned the two-family house in which he occupied a room, and he was given a decent burial.

Public Administrator Hammer went to the Morris avenue house the other day and searched the room in hope of finding information which might lead to relatives. In bureau drawers he found bank books representing deposits of $20,000. Under an ice box there was $2,041 in bills, and hidden in the hair of an old settee was $100 in gold.

ATLANTIS.

The island of Atlantis belongs, if not to the realm of pure fable, to the region of uncertain tradition, which amounts to about the same thing. Spoken of by Plato and other classical writers as "lying over against the Pillars of Hercules" (the Strait of Gibraltar), no one has ever been able to give any definite information concerning it. The story belongs to the most nebulous region of history, and is probably nothing but fiction. If the great island "over against the Pillars of Hercules" had ever existed there would certainly have been some definite knowledge concerning it.

NEW THINGS IN SCIENCE.

A watch enclosed within a pearl a little more than half an inch in diameter has been made by a French jeweler.

A reservoir within a Chicago inventor's massage device permits massage cream to be applied as it is being used.

Beneath a new washing machine is a stove, so that water can be heated in its tank without additional handling.

Electric lights that can be used for signaling are included in policemen's helmets that have been invented in England.

THE AFRICAN PYGMIES.

The African pygmies are not creatures of fiction. They are small, but very real beings, as many travelers through the Congo forests can testify. These human dwarfs are about four feet in height (sometimes taller), and are generally understood to be exceedingly savage in disposition. What they don't know about woodcraft is not worth knowing, and to encounter them in the dark, tropical woods is dangerous indeed. They live entirely by hunting, their homes being sometimes in the holes and caverns of the earth, and sometimes in the trees. They are evidently in the lowest human stage, about as near the animals as it is possible for human beings to be.

155 POUNDS PRESSURE TO BREAK EGG SHELL

Apparently nothing in the world is easier to crack than an egg shell. But, says a scientist who has studied the subject, it requires 112 pounds pressure to break the shell of a white egg, and about 155 pounds pressure to break a brown egg shell. Some have been found which were so tough that it required 175 pounds pressure to crush this cover, and other brown shells yielded at a pressure of 125 pounds. But all brown shells are made of stouter stuff than the white.

These figures become the more amazing when it is borne in mind that the thickness of an egg shell is just .013 of an inch, and the average diameter of an egg one and three-quarter inches. Considering the thinness of the shell its resistance is pronounced as remarkable.

RATS WERE THIEVES.

Supposing that sneak thieves had been stealing from her home for the past few years, and, in her mind, accusing small boys of the mischief, Mrs. Bessie Hudson, of Georgetown, Del., was shocked to regain the lost articles when workmen, in making repairs to the kitchen floor, found them strewn in different places under the board, where rats had dragged them.

For the past two years Mrs. Hudson had been missing various articles, including three silver spoons, a silver dinner-bell, a comb-case and other small articles. She supposed that children were systematically stealing from her home, and set various traps, but never caught them.

STOLE $25,000 TO HELP HIS FRIENDS PAY TAXES

Benjamin G. Reed, sixty-eight, former tax collector and treasurer of Whitman, and known throughout the county as "Honest Ben," recently began a two-year term in the House of Correction, after pleading guilty to the larceny of town funds amounting to $25,000.

"I may have done wrong, I realize it now, and am willing to take my punishment," Reed said. "I did the best I could. Not one cent of the $25,000 has been appropriated to my own use."

Reed said that at the time of manipulating his accounts business was dull in Whitman and many of his friends were unable to pay their taxes.

"I knew that if I pressed many of them who owed taxes," he went on, "it meant the loss of hundreds of homes and the wiping out of small bank accounts. I collected money and applied it to the accounts of those who could not pay year after year."

DAMM CHILDREN GIVEN NEW NAME

Because William Joergen Damm of 5 Flower street, New Rochelle, N. Y., claimed that his name was an annoyance to him and very displeasing to his children, County Judge Frank L. Young signed an order which allows him to change his name to William Joergen Dale after December 4.

The petitioner sets forth that he is 39 years of age, and that he was born at Ottawa, Ill., and that he has four children, several of whom are attending school. Then he goes on to say why he objects to his present surname:

"That while his children are in the schoolroom their minds are distracted by constant conversation among the children which is directed toward their name by the use of the words, 'there are the Damm children,' and other such appellations. That their attention is naturally distracted from their studies and their condition of mind is impaired by such conduct."

Mr. Damm concludes his petition by the statemen that "the word damn is a slang phrase used by unthinking people."

"MINING" MUSHROOMS.

The queerer the place selected for a mushroom garden the finer, it seems, is the growth of this popular table delicacy. The last word in a mushroom farm, however, is such a garden placed in the depths of a deserted coal mine, hundreds of feet below the ground.

Not far from Morgantown, W. Va., there is located this old coal mine, known as the Pittsburgh Coal Seam, in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Theodore F. Imbach, an assistant in the State Agricultural Experimental Station at Morgantown, obtaining a permit from the owners of the property. He encamped on the first level, and made chemical analysis of the rocky soil.

He found it was rich in moisture, and its constituents exactly those needed by edible fungi for their quickest and most luxuriant growth. He therefore started a mushroom farm and found the spot was ideal for his purpose. The "mushroom mine" makes large shipments weekly to the city markets.

MAY DRAFT AXEMEN TO SPRUCE FORESTS

Serious consideration is being given to the advisability of organizing battalions of trained woodsmen to assist in getting airplane spruce logs out of the Washington and Oregon forests. Several weeks ago there was a shortage of 30 per cent in the supply of labor for this work. Since then some of the men called for military service have been exempted to engage in logging.

Inasmuch as the demand for spruce, owing to the great aviation programme of the United States, has multiplied several times, such exemptions would be only a drop in the bucket. The first forest regiment already is in France getting out timber for military uses. The first two battalions of the 2d Forest Regiment, numbering 1,500 men, have been fully organized.

The organizing of other battalions and their assignment, at least temporarily, to duty in the Pacific Coast forests now seems a necessary move. Great Britain, France and Italy are dependent upon the United States for spruce airplane stock, and the launching of America's great project to "enter Germany via the air route" has increased the demand several times.

TRAGEDY ON SHORE OF ARCTIC OCEAN.

Sinnisiak, one of two Eskimos from the Bloody Falls country, on trial at Edmonton, Canada, for the murder of Father Rouviere and Father Lerous, has confessed to the crime.

Sinnisiak told how he and Lluksuk, the other defendant, were engaged by Father Lerous to draw his sleigh through the Copper Mine River district; how, during a terrific storm, they quarreled, and how he (Sinnisiak), becoming frightened, slipped a knife between the priest's shoulder blades.

Father Rouviere fled, but made slow progress through the drifts, and soon was shot down by the Eskimos, who, with ax and knife cut up the two bodies, eating the livers, according to the confession.

The Eskimos were returned for trial recently, after a two years' search by a little group of Royal Northwest Mounted Police over a 3,000-mile trail through the wildest of the North country.

SHOES THAT WEAR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Soon we may be buying shoes with a 6,000 mile guarantee, if the lessons of the war should tempt some astute manufacturer to introduce Esparto grass shoes in America. These are made principally in Spain and Portugal, and to some extent in the mountain districts of France bordering upon Spanish territory. A single pair often will last twenty-five years, it is said, and a pair of Esparto shoes only ten years old may be said to have been just "broken in."

This grass is of a peculiar toughness, is practically wear-proof, and makes a very comfortable shoe. The Spanish peasants fashion the fibre into a shoe that resembles a moccasin, sometimes dyed in lively tints. The sole is loosely woven, and in the course of years, sand and gravel adhere to the sole, making it as hard as leather. But they are said to be thoroughly comfortable at all times.

Recently a foreign concern established a plant in Spain and started to make these shoes for export. But it is said that the firm used an inferior grade of the grass and its shoes did not prove satisfactory. But the high cost of leather and the long wearing qualities of the Esparto shoe combine to offer what appears to be an excellent opportunity for a good stroke of business.

BUFFALO INCREASING.

The Biological Survey of the Department of Agriculture is charged with the maintenance of 72 reservations, five of which are big game preserves and 67 bird reservations.

The mammal reservations include the Montana Bison Range, the Wind Cave Game Preserve in South Dakota, the Niobrara Reservation in Nebraska, the Elk Refuge in Wyoming, and the Sullys Hill Game Preserve in North Dakota.

The Niobrara Reservation was intended as a bird reserve, but has been stocked with big game, and is at present maintained chiefly for buffalo and elk.

In the first three reservations above mentioned, the herds of buffalo have shown a notable increase since their establishment a few years ago, and now include 207 head, or more than a third of all the buffalo which now belong to the government.

The elk number about 159, and the antelope 40, making a total of about 400 head of big game.

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